

The third 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, September 30, 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 Provost Epstein informing the members of the Committee on Educational Policy's decision to make the common teaching evaluation form that was approved by the faculty for tenure-track faculty last year, the default form for the automated system for tenured faculty members as well. Use of this form will not be a requirement for tenured faculty.

Provost Epstein next shared the news that the college has received a generous gift that has as its goal fostering further interaction among humanities disciplines at Amherst. The funds will support the transformation of a home to create new spaces that will house some of the college's humanities departments, seminar rooms, and performance and other common areas. Already owned by Amherst, the home is located at 197 South Pleasant Street. The provost said that she has spoken with the members of several humanities departments, and that some of them are enthusiastic about the prospect of moving to the new space, which will include an addition to the original home. Professor Goutte asked whether relocating some departments would generate additional spaces for faculty offices in the spaces that will be vacated. Provost Epstein responded that the net gain would likely not be too great. For example, if the history department were to move, it would leave behind offices in the basement of Chapin Hall that would likely not be attractive for reuse, due to the diluvial history of the building. Professor Basu asked if all humanities departments will be invited to consider the possibility of moving to the house. The provost said that she welcomes expressions of interest from all humanities departments, while noting that, when considering relocation, departments that face significant challenges in their current spaces will be the priority. Expressing enthusiasm for the project, Professor Sims suggested creating a path adjacent to the house, which would enable students going to the Cadigan Center for Religious Life to have a more direct route. Provost Epstein concluded her remarks by informing the members that the response to her invitation to apply for the college's new Mellon-funded faculty leadership seminar has been robust among associate and full professors; twenty tenured colleagues will participate in the seminar, which will begin this month, she noted.

At 2:55 P.M., Lisa Rutherford, chief policy officer and general counsel, and Norm Jones, chief diversity and inclusion officer, joined the meeting. Ms. Rutherford offered general legal advice related to the tenure process and answered questions posed by the committee. Mr. Jones spoke with the members about approaches to mitigating bias when reading teaching evaluations, and in the tenure process more generally. At the conclusion of the conversation, the members thanked Ms. Rutherford and Mr. Jones, and they left the meeting at 3:30 P.M.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Sims thanked the president and provost for their support of the recent Global Climate Strike on campus. She then turned to the topic of the college's plans to renovate Gooding and Hills fields, raising concerns surrounding the conversion of Hills Field from grass to an artificial surface, the impact of the projects on intramural and club sports, and the possible environmental repercussions. Professor Sims asked about the process of engaging with student groups when considering options. Provost Epstein explained that Gooding Field, the artificial-turf field just west of Pratt Field, was intended to have a lifespan of ten years, but has already been in use for thirteen. Colleagues in athletics anticipate that it will no longer be possible to play on the field after this fall's field hockey season concludes. The provost said that she has been told that, at the time of its installation, the type of turf used for Gooding served field hockey, and a range of other sports, well. Over the past decade, however, field hockey has moved to a much tighter and shorter-nap surface (Astro-turf or its equivalent). As a result, field hockey is now the only varsity sport at Amherst that is not played on its preferred surface, which presents a number of issues, including concerns about equity.

Continuing the conversation, Provost Epstein noted that the result of replacing Gooding's current surface with Astro-turf would be that the field would no longer serve the broad range of sports, including clubs and intramurals, that it currently hosts. She understands that Astro-turf is a very hard and fast surface that is not conducive to sports such as lacrosse and soccer, and recreational activities. As an alternative, the college has decided to pursue a "two-field" approach. The narrow Hills Field, which has a natural-grass surface and is

situated on the lower tier adjacent to and west of Gooding, will be expanded to accommodate an Astro-turf surface that will meet the needs of field hockey. With a dedicated location for field hockey in place at Hills, the current outdated surface on Gooding will be replaced with a surface that is ideal for a full range of club and intramural sports (with occasional use by varsity sports teams). While some recreational club and intramural athletes enjoy playing on a natural-grass surfaces, colleagues in athletics believe that the year-round access to a new multi-sport surface on Gooding (which will be made possible by the conversion of Hills) will be appreciated by students. They will benefit from a predictable surface that will be available for extended use even during the winter, when snow can be removed. Snow removal is not possible on natural-grass fields. The provost said that a good deal of grass-surface fields (Memorial, Hitchcock and the lawn in front of athletics) will continue to provide a natural surface for those club and intramural teams that prefer to play on grass.

Professor Sims expressed support for expanded playing opportunities, but said that she hopes this could be balanced with concerns about the environmental and health impacts of shifting to a greater number of fields with artificial surfaces. These include the loss of drainage, habitat, and cooling provided by vegetated surfaces, as well as the potential health impacts from volatile organic compounds, crumb rubber, and the transmission of bacterial infections associated with artificial turf. These health concerns remain under study by the EPA and other organizations, she noted. (Following the meeting, the provost consulted with Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, about some of Professor Sims's concerns. He noted that there are numerous peer-reviewed studies that establish the safety of artificial fields. The sports architect who is working on this project is assembling a list of these studies and will forward it to the college.) The provost noted that the architect who is working on Hills Field has designed a system (a subsurface detention reservoir) that will collect surges of rainwater and ensure that the run-off amount and rate of flow to the storm water system will not increase. In addition, the field's "geo-tech" design will allow for the water in the new system to percolate into the ground in the same way a permeable natural field does. While the Astro-turf requires watering to optimize conditions for field hockey, the low-flow irrigation system has been designed to minimize water use. Professor Sims wondered about the possibility of building additional fields or indoor space, as she agrees that there are substantial wellness benefits to athletic activities. J. Brassord later commented that the option of building a fieldhouse, which could be designed with an indoor artificial playfield, albeit of limited size, is considered in the college's campus framework plan. Provost Epstein said that the college considered numerous alternatives to the two-field option described above, including building a field at the Dakin Estate or along Snell Street, but determined that these locations are too remote from campus, would require clear cutting of large wooded areas and other significant changes to the landscape; posed potential security risks for students; and would not provide the benefit of the other sports-related services offered by the Pratt Field complex (e.g., Conway Field House). These options were also significantly more expensive than the two-field option that includes conversion of Hills Field, she noted. Provost Epstein said that she has not heard complaints from students about the plans for the fields and noted that there have been two community meetings about the project, which were sparsely attended, she believes. The provost encouraged Professor Sims to attend another community meeting that would be held in the evening (September 30). Provost Epstein suggested that Professor Sims and anyone else who has questions contact Don Faulstick, director of athletics, or Gregg DiNardo, associate director of athletics. (Professor Sims later noted that she did attend the September 30 meeting.)

Turning to another topic, Professor Sims asked how the committee would prioritize its work of the semester. Provost Epstein said that she and Associate Provost Tobin have assembled a list of possible agenda items, noting that the list has been shared with the committee. Included are items that are being carried over from last year, as well as new topics for discussion. No doubt this list will grow over the course of the year, as new issues are brought to the committee, the provost said. Members are also welcome to suggest topics at any time. Professor Sims noted that some issues are time sensitive and suggested that the committee review the full list of topics and establish a schedule with this factor in mind. Provost Epstein said that time sensitivities, among other factors, are taken into account when setting the committee's weekly agenda. Professor Goutte suggested that the committee raise questions about agenda items under "Questions from Committee Members." Professor Sims inquired about two issues that she thought might be time sensitive. She asked about a proposal to develop a comprehensive housing plan for the college, citing the need to take action because of decisions being faced by some members of the community. She also wondered if issues relating to the new student center

and plans for additional classrooms will need to be addressed sooner rather than later because of pressing needs surrounding these projects. President Martin said that no decisions will be made about the student center until an architect is chosen for the project. Once an architect is selected, which should be soon, consultation with the campus community about the student center, a process that has already begun, will continue, she noted. The addition/renovation of classrooms will occur incrementally over many years, Provost Epstein commented, and there are no pressing issues beyond the consideration of the teaching schedule at this time, she noted.

The members next reviewed a revised draft of guidelines for the administration of teaching evaluations, and finalized the document, which they decided should be shared with the chairs of academic departments and programs at their meeting on Friday, as well as with the Consultative Group for Untenured Faculty.

Prompted by Professor Sitze's questions about the role and authority of the position of provost and dean of the faculty, which he conveyed in [a letter to the committee](#), as well as the committee's own conversation about this topic at an earlier meeting, the members suggested that President Martin share her rationale for changing the title of Amherst's chief academic officer, and the implications of this decision. The president responded that, as she had announced in an email to the community last March (restating in her remarks here some of what she had written then), she decided to make the change, after consultation with last year's Committee of Six and the board of trustees, to convey with greater clarity the central role that the position plays in the academic and administrative life of the college. The president pointed out that the only position that is more senior within the college's administration is that of president, a status as "number two" that the title of the position should reflect, in her view. She noted that the chief academic officer at nearly all of Amherst's peer institutions is called either provost and dean of the faculty, provost and dean of the college, or vice-president of academic affairs.

Continuing the conversation, some members asked how the current role of the provost differs from the earlier one, which the president had established and which did not appear to be successful. President Martin responded that, when she had decided to create the position of provost at Amherst in 2013, she had felt that the college needed a position at a very high level that would help build a capacity for integrated administration and planning. Over time she came to understand, that for the provost model to be effective at Amherst, the position would need to have a focal role in Amherst's academic life. Given the preeminence of the position of the dean of the faculty at the college, it had been difficult for the provost to fulfill the responsibilities of the job, as it had originally been conceived. The provost position created in 2013 was useful in catalyzing and organizing important strategic planning efforts of Amherst faculty and staff; however, as structured, the position did not ultimately work for Amherst, and the needs identified by President Martin remained. Over the past several years, the responsibilities that she had once envisioned residing with the provost had shifted to the dean of the faculty, and Amherst essentially then had a provost structure, but without the formal title. Areas ranging from study away, to career planning and development, to international partnerships, to data-gathering and reporting have benefited from closer ties to the chief academic officer of the college, and to the vision and perspectives of the faculty, President Martin reiterated. In response to emerging needs and goals, the reporting lines of a number of administrative offices that support Amherst's academic mission directly—some entities of long-standing at the college and some newly established—are now positioned under the provost's office. These areas include the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning, the Center for Community Engagement, the Office of Fellowships, the Grants Office, the Office of Global Education, the Office of Institutional Research, the new science center, the Emily Dickinson Museum, and the Center for Humanistic Inquiry, and the Center for Teaching and Learning. The centrality and breadth of the administrative work of the dean of the faculty has also expanded, with the dean's responsibilities extending to areas of student life, advancement, and finance.

In conclusion, President Martin commented that the position's new responsibilities were undertaken at the same time that the dean of the faculty continued to oversee all functions and areas of the college that have traditionally been within the purview of Amherst's chief academic officer. Though in recent discussion, some faculty have suggested that the dean of the faculty and provost roles are separate, the president explained that they are actually one integrated position. The returning members of the committee noted that they had supported the idea of renaming the position last year and remain in favor of the decision now. Professor Goutte, who had raised some questions about the decision during the last conversation about changing the title, said that she had found the president's explanation for changing the title of the chief academic officer to be compelling and reassuring. Professor Sims, who had raised the question of whether changes to the handbook

should go before the faculty, also found the explanation helpful. The president was encouraged to present this information to the faculty. At the committee's request, President Martin agreed to discuss this matter with the faculty at the faculty meeting the next evening. The members decided to consider at one of their future meetings the process for revising the *Faculty Handbook* to reflect the change to the title.

Discussion returned to the college's policy regarding consensual sexual relationships between faculty members and students (*Faculty Handbook*, (IV., A., 3.)). The committee reviewed the policies of some peer institutions assembled by the provost's office, agreed that several would serve as good models to emulate, and asked to be provided with some additional policies from liberal arts colleges within the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) and several other elite liberal arts colleges. The committee agreed that reviewing the policies in hand is helpful and affirms that Amherst is an outlier in not prohibiting faculty members from engaging in consensual sexual relationships with students. Professor Basu, who said that she is in favor of re-thinking Amherst's policy, said that, in discussions about any proposal for change in the direction of prohibition, it will be important to be attentive to issues of process and procedure. For example, what would the mechanisms be for reporting such relationships? Should the penalty be greater if a faculty member doesn't report the relationship? Through what mechanism would a third party make a report? Professor Schmalzbauer wondered if faculty would become mandated reporters under a new policy that prohibited these relationships. Continuing, Professor Basu raised some additional questions. What are the appropriate penalties or range of penalties for having a sexual relationship? In her view, any sanctions should be greater for the faculty member than for the student. The other members concurred. The question was also raised as to whether any new policy should extend to relations between staff and students and/or between tenured and untenured faculty. The members agreed that having a committee-of-the whole discussion about these and other issues would be informative.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Brooks commented that she would hope, and prefer, that the faculty's discussion of this topic would focus less on procedures to address complaints and violations, including possible penalties, and more on the reasons for changing and implementing the policy, including the evidence drawn from policies of peer institutions and social science research that demonstrates the detrimental effects of these relationships on education—both for those students who may be directly involved in a relationship with a faculty member, as well as other students. In regard to the reasons for a reconsideration of the current policy now, she wonders if it might be informative to present at the faculty meeting the latest research on the impacts of faculty-student sexual relationships on the teaching environment. Professor Schmalzbauer said that she would also like to learn more about the arguments that led the faculty to adopt the current policy and to retain it as other schools moved in the direction of prohibition. Provost Epstein said that her office would gather and share the minutes of previous discussions by the Committee of Six and in faculty meetings on this topic.

Professor Sims asked who else beyond faculty should fall under a prohibition of these relationships. The members agreed that, based on the important mentoring and personal development roles that coaches play, they should fall under any new policy that is adopted, and that there might be other staff members to which the policy should, perhaps, apply. Professor Horton suggested that consideration be given to how the issue at hand should apply to students who grade the work of other students. Some members wondered if staff members, including recent graduates who are in authority roles in relation to students, as well as current students who grade student work, should be required to notify the college about a relationship with a current student. Such situations might require notification and recusal for roles involving structural authority over a student. The provost noted that, under a prohibition policy, if a relationship between a faculty member and a student were to be reported, informal resolutions to the matter could be sought first. Depending on the success of that approach and the seriousness of the issues involved, it could be necessary to engage in the current grievance process for faculty as a next step. It was agreed that the provost should be able to exercise some discretion in these cases, as is true in other circumstances. Provost Epstein said that there may not be a process in place for staff that is comparable to the faculty grievance process, and that she would see if there are any plans to develop both a policy about sexual relationships between staff and students and a process for addressing such relationships if they should occur.

At the conclusion of the conversation, the members agreed to draft a policy that would prohibit sexual relationships between Amherst College faculty and Amherst College students and between Amherst College coaches and Amherst College students and to seek the faculty's feedback via a committee-of-the-whole conversation at a faculty meeting. At that meeting, the members agreed that it will be particularly important to hear the views of faculty who are relatively new to the college. The members then discussed whether the prohibition should extend to sexual relationships between Amherst faculty members and Five-College students who enroll in classes at Amherst. It was agreed that it should.

The committee then turned briefly to a personnel matter.

The meeting adjourned at 5:18 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty