

The eighth 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, November 4, 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.

Responding to a question that was asked at the committee’s last meeting, Provost Epstein informed the members that sixty-five faculty members have participated in the intensive advising program thus far. Continuing with her remarks, she noted that four members of the Committee of Six have indicated that they will be available to meet with three members of the Consultative Group for Untenured Faculty on November 14. The purpose of the meeting is to seek the consultative group’s feedback on the committee’s draft guidelines for administering the common teaching evaluation form. Following that meeting, the committee agreed to finalize the guidelines, informed by the views of the chairs of academic departments and programs, which had been invited earlier, and of the consultative group. Since academic department coordinators will be focusing on the implementation of the new evaluation form for pre-tenure faculty for the first time this semester, the expectation is that departments will begin following the guidelines for evaluations conducted this spring.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Sims returned to the topic of planning efforts surrounding space on campus, seeking to learn more about short- and long-term plans to address the shortage of offices for faculty and staff and classrooms. Having reviewed [the campus framework plan](#), she said that she finds the document to be somewhat outdated. Some projects discussed in the framework plan have been completed, or progress is being made on completing them, she has observed. Other projects will clearly not come to fruition. For example, she noted, the concept of making use of the McGuire building for office space is an idea that is no longer viable, as plans call for McGuire (and Merrill) to be demolished to make the site available for the new student center. President Martin explained that the framework plan, which was completed in 2017, defines possibilities for the evolution of the campus, in response to programmatic needs that may emerge over the years. Taking McGuire as an example, she noted that the plan identifies the Merrill/ McGuire buildings (or their location) as an important core site for the campus that could accommodate a number of functions. The plan also notes that a renovation or a replacement of the buildings would be required to serve these functions. Extensive study of McGuire has shown that the cost to convert it to a standalone building would be prohibitive, as it is a fully interconnected wing of Merrill that relies on Merrill’s mechanical and electrical systems, the provost said. President Martin commented that the framework plan, unlike a traditional master plan, is not meant to plan for particular capital projects. As is noted in the framework plan itself, such a plan is “deliberately an adaptable tool that is grounded in clear principles and a broad vision of the future.” That said, President Martin said that she would ask Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, to consider how the framework plan might be updated.

Continuing, President Martin noted that it is not possible to put formal plans in place beyond a certain horizon, since the landscape, vision, and available resources can change when it comes to building projects. She commented that new opportunities—for example a donor providing the funding for the renovation of 197 South Pleasant Street—can arise suddenly and have an impact on planning. President Martin said that, at present, she foresees that the projects that will be prioritized over the next five years are the construction of the student center, the renovation of Keefe Campus Center for faculty offices, and the renovation of 197 South Pleasant Street, which will house some academic departments and have some space for

seminars and other uses. Professor Sims commented that, while she understands that planning should be responsive and can be fluid, she feels that it would ideally be possible to provide a sense of short- and long-term plans for meeting the needs of the campus, in particular for faculty and staff offices and classrooms. The options offered in the framework plan piggyback on one another, so updating the plan seems necessary. Professor Horton agreed, commenting that it would be helpful to have a conversation about the shortage of classrooms and offices, including the ways in which the use of teaching slots is affecting the availability of classrooms. President Martin said that she would be happy to have J. Brassord create a list of space needs and priorities and to have a discussion with the committee.

Professors Horton and Goutte reiterated their concerns about what they see as a shortage of office and classroom space in the science center. Provost Epstein said that she has asked Associate Provost and Associate Dean of the Faculty Cheney to provide detailed information about the intended use of classroom, lab, and office spaces in the science center. He has already informed her that many spaces that are currently being used by visitors and staff, often at the request of science departments, are intended for future faculty hires. As such hiring occurs, new faculty will move into these spaces, and science departments will need to reassign current occupants to other spaces. Private offices and/or labs for visitors and staff were not included in the plans for the science center, and some of these individuals will need to share space in the end. Professor Goutte said that she is unaware that plans called for instructional staff not to have private offices, as it is necessary for instructional staff to meet privately with students. Provost Epstein said that it is her understanding that shared spaces for conducting such meetings may be the most efficient means of meeting space needs. Some members said that it would be challenging to schedule office hours and drop-in times for students in a shared space, given the constraints of the academic schedule and students' co-curricular activities and multiple faculty or staff members' schedules. Professor Horton and Goutte commented that, in recent years, there have been a significant number of visitors teaching in their departments, and that finding appropriate office space has been a challenge. Professor Goutte suggested that, for visitors who cannot be housed in their departments, finding a space for them to be housed together could be beneficial, rather than having them dispersed across campus in addition to not being near department colleagues. Provost Epstein commented that, due to space constraints and other factors, it is not even possible to house all tenure-line faculty in their departments. President Martin said that she can envision some spaces opening up when several departments move to 197 South Pleasant Street and Keefe is renovated. Professor Schmalzbauer said that she is pleased that more academic functions and activities at the renovated house will create new reasons for students to cross Route 116, effectively extending the campus. Professor Brooks commented that the issue of space is prominent and complex, noting that there are always multiple and often conflicting ideas that come into play when considering competing needs.

The committee urged the president and provost to seek the input of the faculty when considering space needs during the period before Keefe and 197 South Pleasant Street are completed. Professor Sims commented that developing systematic ways of keeping the community informed about space plans is important, and President Martin agreed. Professor Sims reiterated her concern about moving the staff in the newly created shared services department off campus, and she expressed hope that this approach would not become a trend, and that future plans would allow these staff to return to locations within walking distance of

campus facilities. President Martin said that there are no plans to move large numbers of staff members off campus. The members then turned to personnel matters.

The committee next discussed concerns that were conveyed by a faculty member, in anticipation of the committee-of-the-whole conversation about the committee's draft policy on *Consensual Sexual or Romantic Relations between Faculty and Students*, which would take place the next day. Some of the concerns that the faculty member raised focused on the following: the way in which the Committee of Six had framed the committee-of-the-whole discussion (the idea that the committee did not provide the faculty with sufficient background surrounding the proposed policy and the range of arguments, both pros and cons, of prohibiting consensual sexual relations between faculty and students); the amount of time that had been provided for reflection by the faculty was insufficient, with the result that the faculty would not be ready to debate the issue in a deliberative manner at the meeting; the approach taken, which was thought to be unduly punitive and could create a culture of surveillance and have a chilling effect on faculty-student relations (making them more formal and constrained); the danger that the policy would result in administrative oversight of people's personal lives; a lack of discussion about the proposed policy in the context of the American Association of University Professors' 1995 statement "Consensual Relations Between Faculty and Students," with which existing policy is consistent; and a lack of clarity about procedures that would be used to address violations of the policy.

The committee noted that, in addition, the faculty member who had shared these views, as well as another faculty member, pointed out that the document that had been linked to the faculty meeting agenda that had categorized the sexual relations policies of peer schools, and included links to those policies, had contained some errors. The committee apologized for the errors, which largely were the result of not reading policies closely enough and not assigning some policies to the proper category. Professors Horton and Brooks agreed to re-read the policies closely on the committee's behalf; a revised version of the document would then be posted before the faculty meeting, the committee decided. ([This document](#) was later posted.)

The committee found many of the ideas and responses that had been put forward to be valuable, while also questioning the logic behind some of the arguments. The members said that they looked forward to learning more about the faculty's views during the conversation at the faculty meeting the next day. It was agreed that a broad discussion of the draft policy is the intended purpose of the committee-of-the-whole conversation. The members noted that all views would be welcome and said that they would consider the feedback that emerges from the discussion and revise the draft policy, accordingly. It was agreed that what is learned from the discussion would help the committee to write a better policy. The committee began this process by discussing a concern that had also been shared by the faculty member who had raised most of the other issues, about including the word "romantic," when describing the relations covered under the draft policy. Returning to an earlier discussion about whether the policy should address romantic relations, as well as sexual relations between faculty and students, the committee agreed that judging what is or is not meant by "romantic" presents a challenge. The committee then decided to strike "romantic" from the proposed policy.

The members agreed that, moving forward, it will be important to resolve questions of process surrounding what the mechanisms should be for reporting relationships that violate the policy, what protections would be in place for faculty and students, and what the range of penalties should be for violating the policy. The question was also raised as to whether the penalty should be greater if faculty members don't report prohibited relationships in which they

have engaged. In response to a question about whether faculty would become mandated reporters of prohibited relationships, the provost confirmed that this would not be the case, and that there is a separate process that is already in place to address sexual misconduct. In response to some questions about the process that would be used to address violations of the proposed policy, the members confirmed that the intention would be to follow the process that is in place for addressing other faculty disciplinary matters (See [Faculty Handbook III.I., 1. and 2.](#)).

The meeting concluded with a discussion about whether moving to a policy of prohibition could change the culture at Amherst in significant ways. The members wondered whether the cultures of other colleges that have adopted a policy of prohibition have experienced the type of significant negative effects that are feared. President Martin commented that a policy of prohibition could improve a culture, as setting limits and having greater accountability can free members of a community to engage in close relationships, without worrying about what the appropriate boundaries are. She wonders whether there is evidence that setting clear boundaries inevitably leads to punitive shaming. The members said that they continue to believe that Amherst's current policy is wanting, because it does not state clearly enough what the members agree is the crux of the matter, that sexual relations between faculty members and students compromise the integrity of the educational process and violate the trust that students have in faculty members. The committee ended the meeting by concurring that the upcoming discussion at the faculty meeting would inform the draft policy in important ways.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty