

The first 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 9, 2019.

Present, in addition to the president, were Professors Basu, Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims; Provost Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with a conversation about ways in which the Amherst community might engage in the [Global Climate Strike](#) movement, an initiative that is being led by youth around the world to raise awareness about the threat posed by climate change, and to stimulate action, particularly among politicians. As part of the strikes, which will take place on September 20 and September 27, individuals will “walk out” of their jobs, schools, and homes, interrupting the rhythm of daily life. President Martin said that it is her understanding that some Amherst students are planning to participate in the Global Climate Strike by walking out of their classes. Other events may also be planned on campus. The members expressed support for the global initiative and for the college continuing to take a strong stand on this issue.

The committee then discussed briefly possible approaches that would allow faculty, staff, and students to participate in the walk out and/or educational events. It was agreed that individual faculty members will need to consider how they will respond to their students walking out of a class. Professor Horton suggested that faculty take a flexible approach if students miss classes for this purpose, likening the response to that used when students miss class in order to observe religious holidays. In regard to the possibility of cancelling classes, Professor Goutte expressed particular concern about the challenges of making up cancelled labs. Professors Schmalzbauer, Basu, Brooks, and Sims expressed support for finding ways to make it possible for faculty, students, and staff to participate. The president, and the provost agreed. Professor Sims suggested that a possible approach might be to designate a limited period of time when a campus gathering might occur, and staff members could be released from their work. This approach would allow the college to support these important global efforts, she said, while minimizing disruption in regard to labs and maintaining faculty autonomy with regard to holding or cancelling classes.

At the conclusion of the conversation, it was decided that Provost Epstein should consult with Jesse Barba, director of Institutional Research and Registrar Services, to learn how many classes and labs would be affected. Provost Epstein agreed to gather these data and to report back to the committee; President Martin said that she would try to learn more about students’ ideas, as a number of students have reached out to her about the events they are planning.

Provost Epstein next reviewed issues of confidentiality and attribution in the committee’s minutes, noting that the public minutes should be used as a guide in regard to questions of whether matters discussed by the committee can be shared with others. She also discussed the circumstances under which the committee would communicate via email. It was agreed that email will not be used to communicate about personnel or other confidential matters, and that the use of email to address Committee of Six deliberations should be kept to a minimum in general.

Continuing with her remarks about the ways in which the committee will work, the provost discussed with the members the long-standing policy of appending letters to the minutes when the committee has discussed the matters contained within them. Colleagues are informed by the provost’s office as to when their letters will be appended. If colleagues state at the outset that they do not want the contents of a letter discussed in the public minutes, the committee will decide whether it wishes to take up the matter in question. The members decided that, for reasons of transparency, comments by committee members should be attributed by name in the

minutes. It was agreed that the committee's regular meeting times will be 2:30 P.M. on Mondays this fall.

Turning to the schedule for faculty meetings this fall, the members decided that the following dates should be held for possible faculty meetings: October 1, November 5, December 3, and December 17. The provost informed the members that Janet Tobin, associate provost, will continue to serve as the recorder of Committee of Six minutes. Nancy Ratner, director of academic projects, will serve as the recorder of the faculty meeting minutes. The committee agreed that there should be a faculty meeting on October 1 and decided that Matt McGann, dean of admission and financial aid, should be invited to give a presentation. Topics could include information about the first-year class and the work that Dean McGann is doing to gather data about admission trends, with time left for questions. Provost Epstein agreed to contact Dean McGann about the presentation. The committee then turned briefly to a personnel matter.

The next topic of discussion was potential agenda items for the Committee of Six for the fall of 2019. Provost Epstein reviewed a list with the committee and invited the members to propose additional items. It was agreed that major issues for discussion by the committee will include recommendations of the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee surrounding advising and a sophomore seminar; a continuation of the committee's work to clarify the criteria for tenure, aligning language with practice; the implementation of the common teaching evaluation form for tenure-track faculty; possible changes to the process for soliciting teaching evaluations for tenured faculty; and a review of the policy regarding consensual sexual relationships between faculty and students. Some of the other possible topics include recommendations surrounding student writing that were forwarded to the committee by a faculty member; recommendations of the Consultative Group for Untenured Faculty; and a recommendation, forwarded to the committee by a faculty member, that a comprehensive plan be developed for the future of the college's housing program. Continuing the conversation, Professor Horton asked if adopting background checks will be discussed, as a follow-up to a conversation that had taken place last year. Provost Epstein responded that the college has established a Minors Task Force, which is currently considering background checks and other issues in relation to faculty and staff who interact with minors, for example during summer programs held at Amherst. The question of whether background checks must be conducted for others will likely need to be addressed in the near future, she noted. Professor Horton asked about the status of developing a proposal for an alternative time for faculty meetings. Provost Epstein said that J. Barba has been developing a proposal, while noting that he is overburdened at present (he is acting as the interim registrar and leading a search for a new associate registrar), so he may not be able to complete this work for some time. The related issues of the class schedule, teaching slots, and enrollment patterns, were raised. Provost Epstein noted that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) is examining the issue of courses that have five or fewer students and that she is interested in looking at course-enrollment patterns across the college as well.

Professor Basu reiterated her suggestion of last year that, as a follow-up to the Committee of Six's open meetings with tenure-line faculty, during which a number of issues were raised, research be undertaken to inform the Committee of Six about whether the distribution of service activities is equitable across such factors as faculty rank, departments/fields, gender, and race. Professor Sims agreed, and commented that this issue was raised repeatedly during conversations in which she had participated as a member of the strategic planning committee that had focused on the integration of research, teaching, and learning. Professor Basu noted that, since service extends beyond participating in college committees, it would be helpful to know how much time

colleagues are spending on college and major advising; informal mentoring of students; departmental activities such as searches, chairing, mentoring of pre-tenure colleagues, summer teaching, staff supervision, and personnel processes; office hours; and writing student recommendations. The members suggested asking department chairs to gather data from their colleagues. Provost Epstein, agreeing that it would be helpful to find ways to measure service, while also noting the challenges of being able to do so for forms of service that may be “invisible,” said that she would consult with colleagues in her office about the efficacy of an approach that would rely on self-reporting. Professor Horton suggested that there might be some information that has already been gathered that could prove useful, for example, records of committee service. Provost Epstein commented that J. Barba, who ordinarily would be asked to assist with gathering and analyzing data, cannot focus on this project this term because of the obligations noted above. Professor Sims suggested that it would be useful to articulate the key concerns about service burdens to determine what types of data would be needed. Professor Basu noted that last year the Committee of Six had discussed the increased service demands placed on faculty after they receive tenure, and she wants to follow up by gathering information about college service for assistant, associate, and full professors, and by gender and race for faculty of all ranks.

Turning to another issue, Professor Horton raised questions about the shortage of classrooms that are suitable for team-based learning for classes of twenty-five to thirty students and other issues surrounding the availability of classrooms. Provost Epstein responded that Professor Cheney, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty; Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations; 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. 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. Professor Sims suggested that it would be helpful to look at projections of demand for classrooms, given the current and expected increase in faculty and corresponding smaller class sizes, in order to assess the need for classrooms. Professor Brooks raised the issue of the constraints surrounding time slots in which to teach and the availability of classrooms, asking if the committee could later discuss possible revisions to the schedule of available class times. 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 related issue of a shortage of faculty offices was also raised as a serious concern. 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 noted. It was agreed that Associate Provost Cheney, J. Brassord, and J. Barba should be invited to meet with the committee to discuss these matters. Concluding the conversation, Professor Basu suggested that two other topics be placed on the committee’s agenda—the refinement of the processes used for the nomination of “endangered scholars,” as part of the college’s participation in the [New University in Exile Consortium](#), and the criteria for selecting recipients of the Jeffrey B. Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize.

Provost Epstein next informed the committee that the search for a new director of the library is now under way. The following members of the community are serving on the search committee, which is working in consultation with a search firm: Luis Hernandez, associate chief information officer for IT services and outreach; Karu Kozuma, chief student affairs officer; Mariah Leavitt, archives and special collections preservation specialist; Este Pope, head of digital programs; Sara Smith, arts and humanities librarian; Olufemi Vaughan, professor of black studies and American studies; Kiara Vigil, assistant professor of American studies; and Chimaway Lopez '20. Provost Epstein noted that she and Joe Moore, professor of philosophy, are co-chairing the committee. The members then nominated colleagues to serve on the memorial minute committee for Professor of Mathematics, Emeritus, James Denton, who died on July 14, 2019.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Schmalzbauer asked President Martin if there was any update regarding the Amherst student who was prevented from reaching the college this fall because of a visa denial, as reported at the September 2, 2019, faculty meeting. The president responded that, if that student is able to enter the country before the start of the second semester, the college will consider whether the student could begin studies at Amherst this spring, which would be an exception to regular practice. Professor Schmalzbauer thanked President Martin for the advocacy work she is doing on the student's behalf.

Continuing with questions, Professor Basu thanked President Martin for organizing the visit of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to Amherst and asked if it would be possible for Five-College faculty to attend the October 3 event in Johnson Chapel, or to view the live-streamed conversation between Justice Ginsburg and President Martin. The president said that there is tremendous enthusiasm surrounding Justice Ginsburg's visit, and that the details of the event are still being worked out. Attendance at the conversation itself will be limited to Amherst College students, faculty, and staff who request a ticket. Depending on interest, there may have to be a lottery to select attendees from this group. No public or guest tickets will be available. The college will live-stream the conversation on campus and is exploring options for streaming the event more broadly. A video, which will be available to the public, will be posted on the Amherst website soon after the visit.

Professor Sims next asked if the president would provide further detail about the summer retreat of Amherst's board of trustees, which President Martin had mentioned at the faculty meeting held on Labor Day. President Martin said that the retreat provided an opportunity for the trustees to learn more about the admission and financial-aid processes at Amherst. The purpose was to convey information. Plans for the student center were also discussed at the retreat, but no decisions were made.

The questions portion of the meeting concluded with the committee expressing thanks to the provost for making it possible to bring thirteen Hampshire College faculty to Amherst. The provost said that these appointments were the outcome of searches that had been authorized, and that departments viewed the Hampshire faculty as the strongest candidates in their pools. Provost Epstein said that she is delighted with this result. Discussion turned to a small number of committee nominations. The members then reviewed a proposal for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Stipend competition and selected a nominee.

Turning to another topic, Provost Epstein discussed with the committee the process for revising the *Faculty Handbook* to reflect the change to the title of the position of *dean of the faculty*, which is now called *provost and dean of the faculty*. The provost said that a notation about the change, including the date that it became effective (July 1, 2019), could be referenced

at the beginning of the handbook, and she suggested that the current title be substituted for the former throughout the document. Professor Goutte expressed some hesitation about changing the title in the handbook, commenting that, in this context, the responsibilities and roles that are discussed are consistent with those of the dean of the faculty, a position that has traditionally supported the faculty and academic mission. The provost title suggests a broader set of responsibilities, in her view. Provost Epstein noted that the title of the position of chief academic officer at the college was changed to convey with greater clarity the central role this position plays in the academic and administrative life of the college. All functions and areas of the college that have traditionally been within the purview of the dean of the faculty continue to fall under the position with its new title, she said. The other members agreed that, since *the dean of the faculty* is now called *the provost and dean of the faculty*, the *Faculty Handbook* should adhere to this nomenclature when referencing Amherst's chief academic officer. A simple substitution of the new language seems appropriate, in their view. Professor Sims noted that it might still be good to bring this matter to a vote by the faculty, since it involves changing *Faculty Handbook* language, but deferred to the consensus.

Conversation turned to some revisions to the charge of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning, a body that will focus on issues that touch on Amherst's environment for teaching and learning, the provost noted. The ad hoc committee's chair, Professor O'Hara, has proposed that staff members serve with vote. It has also been suggested that the director of academic projects be a member of the committee. The members asked Provost Epstein whether the committee will be advisory, that is, whether it will make recommendations to other governance bodies. Provost Epstein said that this is the case. She also informed members that, at times, she will serve as the chair's designee from the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), when the CEP chair cannot attend some of the ad hoc committee's weekly meetings. Under those circumstances, she will fill the chair in on what has transpired during the meetings that are missed. After some conversation, the members agreed that staff members should serve with vote. The committee also decided that another faculty member should be asked to serve on the ad hoc committee. The committee agreed that the following changes (in red) should be made to the charge to the ad hoc committee:

Charge to the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Student Learning

The Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Student Learning seeks to understand and enhance students' education at the college. Its activities include identifying the most effective methods of assessing student learning, pedagogical approaches that appreciate diverse learning styles, and best practices at Amherst and other institutions. The ad hoc committee supports the work of college departments and programs and other faculty committees, especially the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP). It is charged with undertaking this work for up to three years. At the conclusion of its term, the members will make a recommendation to the Committee of Six about whether a proposal to create a standing faculty committee on student learning should be brought to the faculty. The ad hoc committee consists of ~~three~~ **four** members of the faculty distributed across the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, who are appointed by the Committee of Six; the chair of the CEP or the chair's designee (another faculty member of the CEP); and the following ex officio members: ~~who serve without vote~~ the provost and dean of the faculty; the

director of Institutional Research and Registrar Services; the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning; the chief diversity and inclusion officer (or that individual's designee); ~~and~~ the chief student affairs officer (or that individual's designee); **and the ad hoc committee's researcher and secretary, a staff member appointed by the provost and dean of the faculty.** ~~The provost and dean of the faculty appoints a researcher, normally the director of academic projects, to inform and support the work of the ad hoc committee ad to serve as its secretary.~~ The ad hoc committee selects one of its ~~three~~ **four** faculty members to serve as its chair.

Discussion turned to [recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Development of a Common Form to Evaluate Classroom Teaching](#) regarding the implementation of the common teaching evaluation form (these recommendations appear on pages eight and nine of the ad hoc committee's report) and the ad hoc committee's recommendation that teaching evaluations become fully anonymous (a topic discussed on pages nine through eleven of the report). Professor Sims began the conversation by commenting that she supports developing a consistent process that would be used across departments to introduce the purpose and importance of teaching evaluations. The message, she noted, should be presented in class on the day in which evaluations will be completed. The other members concurred. Professor Brooks commented on the importance of the tone of the language that is developed to frame this process, noting that the tone can have impact on students' responses. The committee agreed that the provost should ask Professor Gentzler, faculty director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), and Riley Caldwell-O'Keefe, director of the CTL, to draft a script that could be read by faculty members to students before they complete the evaluations. The committee will review the draft and then invite commentary on it by the chairs of academic departments and programs and the Consultative Group for Untenured Faculty. Based on the members' conversation about the ad hoc committee's recommendations surrounding the implementation of the common teaching evaluation form, the committee also decided to develop some guidelines for implementing the form, and to share this document with the chairs and the consultative group.

The committee discussed whether the guidelines should indicate whether it should be permissible for a tenured member of the department or the pre-tenure colleague being evaluated to read the script to students in the class during which the evaluation is done, or whether there should not be a preference or a prohibition. Professor Brooks stressed the importance of not adopting a practice that would disempower or undermine pre-tenure faculty members' authority or position in their classrooms. She suggested soliciting feedback from the consultative group about what would be preferable, an idea supported by the rest of the committee. At the same time, the members concurred with the ad hoc committee's recommendation that the faculty member being evaluated speak very briefly, or not at all, about the purpose and importance of the evaluations. The committee agreed with the ad hoc committee's recommendation that faculty should not be present while students are completing evaluations. The committee also supported the ad hoc committee's recommendation that students complete evaluations in class, in order to ensure the best return rate. Time (about twenty minutes) for the evaluation process should be allocated at the start of class, rather than end, whenever possible, the two committees agreed, and students should be reminded to bring computers to class. It was further agreed that, if a student misses the class in which evaluations are done, the department should try to ensure that the student completes the evaluation outside of class. A paper form should be available as a back-up for students who do not have computers.

Continuing the conversation, some members of the committee also agreed with the ad hoc committee that it is preferable if evaluations are not done during the last class of the term. (It was noted that, by faculty vote, “Evaluations of teaching are to be requested of all students from every course, including every honors and special topics course taught by a tenure-track faculty member. These evaluations are to be signed and are normally to be solicited in essay format in all classes in the final week of each semester on a common evaluation form approved by the faculty.”) If treats are given out on the last day to celebrate the end of a class, students may feel that they are being incentivized to offer a positive evaluation. As a guideline, the committee agreed with the ad hoc committee that, during the time that students are completing evaluations, no treats (donuts, cookies, etc.) should be provided. Some members pointed out that, in order to incentivize students’ completion of evaluations in large courses, some departments currently offer a small fraction of a percentage point to students’ grade (so minor that the final grades are not affected), and others withhold grades until students complete evaluations. Professor Goutte noted that, in her view, without such actions, other efforts will be necessary to ensure high response rates. Some members said that they agreed with the ad hoc committee’s recommendation that students not be rewarded for completing the evaluations or penalized for not completing evaluations.

Turning to the points raised in the ad hoc committee’s report that touch on evaluations in relation to the tenure and reappointment process, the members favored having training on how to read and interpret evaluations, with the goal of identifying and mitigating bias, take place at the department level. The members were less comfortable with the ad hoc committee’s recommendation that the CTL only offer training to tenured faculty and members of the Committee of Six on these topics, preferring that the training become part of the broader program of faculty development. Professor Brooks suggested that workshops be scheduled as part of department meetings in the spring before the fall in which a tenure case will be reviewed. In anticipation of the next conversation on the committee’s agenda, Professor Goutte noted the importance of avoiding viewing the issue of anonymity in isolation. In her view bias training can help departments better understand evaluations that are outliers within a pre-tenure colleague’s teaching record, without knowing the identity of the student who wrote the evaluation. Already department members read evaluations within the context of their experience with the ways in which students respond to particular courses required outside of the major, for example. Professor Sims noted that there are potential sources of bias in both anonymous and signed evaluations. Given this, she feels that, on balance, it is most important to protect pre-tenure faculty by collecting signed evaluations.

At a more specific level, Professor Goutte commented that she agrees with the ad hoc committee’s recommendation that it would be valuable for departments and the Committee of Six to have access to in-class evaluations for each course that are provided in two formats—both by question and by student—as it would be useful to consider the responses in both formats. The provost’s office will consult with colleagues in Information Technology about this recommendation, the provost said. The discussion about guidelines ended on a specific note. It was noted that faculty members who will stand for tenure in the fall of 2020 must be given the option of choosing whether to use the new common evaluation form, or continue to use the form that they have been using in previous years.

The meeting concluded with a brief discussion of some of the benefits and disadvantages of not having students identify themselves on teaching evaluations. Those who served on the committee last year noted that the ad hoc committee’s recommendation that the evaluations become fully anonymous had been discussed in depth. Most members had indicated that they prefer that students continue to be asked to sign their evaluations. Under this, the current system, the department and the Committee of Six are aware of the identity of those who provide

evaluations. Professor Basu said that she hopes that those on both sides of this issue will have a fair hearing, while expressing support for the current system.

Continuing, Professor Basu argued that, at a small college, knowing the identity of the authors of student evaluations can help departments and the Committee of Six place evaluations in context and makes the process of evaluation more human. She feels that it is sometimes useful to read evaluations knowing about the racial, class, and gender composition of the class as a whole and of the students writing evaluations. She said that she has also found that it is sometimes useful for departments and the Committee of Six to know the names of students who submit negative evaluations. Professor Horton expressed the view that having students identify themselves is valuable, agreeing with the argument that they are held accountable for their views in this way. Professor Basu also expressed the view that students feel more of a sense of responsibility for evaluating faculty if they must sign their names, and that departments and the Committee of Six might not give as much weight to anonymous student evaluations.

Professor Schmalzbauer said that, after listening to the arguments about this issue last year, she is torn on the complex question of whether to move to a system that is fully anonymous, though ultimately she feels the argument for anonymity to be more compelling. She continues to feel that it is important to recognize the implicit power dynamic at play in the evaluation process. As such, some students may feel inhibited and may not always offer honest reflections when they have to sign their names, and the literature about the question of anonymous vs. signed teaching evaluations supports this view, she said. Professor Schmalzbauer expressed concern that students from underrepresented backgrounds and first-generation students may feel uncomfortable being candid in evaluations when they must sign their names, while students from more privileged backgrounds may feel more comfortable doing so. She suspects that low-income students might feel more comfortable, and thus hopefully be more forthcoming, if their responses were anonymous. Professor Schmalzbauer also pointed to the trend toward more anonymity in faculty decision-making, and suggested that the same reasoning applies; anonymity helps to equalize an unequal power field and makes respondents feel more comfortable in voicing honest responses. On the other hand, she is moved by the aspirational notion that, by signing their evaluations, students learn accountability.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Professor Basu suggested that a pilot be undertaken. Some tenured colleagues could be asked to have students evaluate their courses using unsigned forms, so student identities would not be available. Other tenured colleagues could be asked to have their classes evaluated under the current system. The results could then be reviewed to try to determine if anonymity has an impact on whether the evaluation is more or less critical, for example. The committee agreed that a pilot of this kind could be informative. Before undertaking such an experiment, the members decided, as recommended by last year's Committee of Six, that there should be a committee-of-whole conversation about the proposal that teaching evaluations become fully anonymous. Ideally, members of the ad hoc committee would make remarks both for and against this proposal. The members agreed to finalize the faculty meeting agenda at their next meeting.

On a final and separate note, the members concurred with the ad hoc committee's view that the purpose of the common evaluation form is summative (evaluating teaching). Faculty should gather formative feedback (suggestions for improvement) throughout the semester, in order to improve the learning experience for students, including by making adjustments in real time.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty