

The twenty-second meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2021–2022 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 p.m. on Monday, April 11, 2022. Present via Zoom, in addition to the president, were Professors Clotfelter, Manion, Martini, Schroeder Rodríguez, Umphrey, and Vaughan; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with Provost Epstein offering congratulations to Professor Vaughan on his recently announced Guggenheim Fellowship. The members offered their warm congratulations as well.

Conversation turned to how best to move forward with the timing of the faculty's consideration of motions that appeared on the April 5 faculty meeting agenda, but which were not discussed at the meeting because time ran out. Since the president's travel schedule does not permit holding a meeting on April 19, the members agreed that a faculty meeting should be held on April 26, due to the importance, in particular, of having a vote on the specifics of the charge of the Tenure and Promotion Committee (TPC) and the proposal to revise the tenure criteria language in the *Faculty Handbook*. In addition, the members decided that the committee should bring forward a motion to have Professors Schroeder Rodríguez and Martini, who would normally continue for a second year on the Committee of Six, each serve on one of the new committees for the 2022–2023 academic year. The goal would be to provide continuity for the inaugural year of the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) and the TPC. It was agreed that Professors Schroeder Rodríguez and Martini should draw straws at the next Committee of Six meeting to decide which committee they might potentially serve on next year.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Umphrey asked if there are plans to open a space for faculty to gather informally for lunch, coffee, and conversation any time soon, and if the creation of such a space is part of future plans. President Martin said that it is her understanding that plans call for a space that can be used for these activities in the new campus center; much of the space there is being planned to be flexible, so that it can meet evolving needs. Professor Umphrey stressed the importance of having a space as soon as possible and wondered if Lewis-Sebring can revert to its former use now. Provost Epstein said that it is her understanding that Lewis-Sebring will continue to be used for overflow student dining for the remainder of this academic year. It is her hope that the space will be available in the fall for faculty and staff dining. Professor Umphrey asked if creative solutions can be found to this problem before the fall, while expressing her appreciation for the parties and dinners that the provost has hosted in an effort to build and maintain connections during this time. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez wondered if it might be possible for faculty and staff to get their meals in Val and then bring their food to Lewis-Sebring as an interim solution. Provost Epstein said that this will not be possible this spring, but that this is one of the plans under consideration for fall. The provost said that she realizes the importance of having a space for faculty and staff to gather over meals and will continue to advocate for opening such a venue, as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Discussion turned to the possible responsibilities of the chair of the FEC. The members suggested that the chair play a leading role in proactively shaping the new committee's agenda. The committee expressed support for shifting to a model that would rely to a lesser degree on the provost's office developing the agenda than is currently the case for the Committee of Six. It was agreed, however, that there would need to be collaboration with the provost's office in regard to setting the agenda. The members supported the idea of having the chair work over the summer, in collaboration with the provost, to identify a couple of major issues that the FEC could address over the course of the next academic year. One such issue that is already on the docket is consideration of ways to reimagine the committee structure, with the goal of streamlining it. The committee also stressed the importance of having the chair of the FEC consult regularly with the chairs of the other major faculty committees (e.g., the Committee on Educational Policy and the Committee on Priorities and Resources). The members also expressed the view that finding ways to improve the processes and culture surrounding faculty meetings should be high on the FEC's agenda, with the goal of finding ways to encourage greater participation and to potentially improve the tenor of discourse. One member suggested that the FEC review issues of concern surrounding faculty meetings that were conveyed by faculty members via the survey conducted by consultant Susan Pierce in this context.

Continuing the discussion of the role of the chair of the FEC, the members agreed that, as a general matter, it would be ideal for the chair of the FEC to serve as a conduit of information to the FEC from other committees. It would be desirable for the chair, and the committee as a whole, to meet with other

committees to learn about the agendas of those bodies, which will often intersect with the FEC's own. In addition, the members suggested, the chair should hold office hours to meet with individual faculty, groups of faculty, and departments, to provide opportunities to raise issues of concern and to answer questions. Professor Manion suggested that creating this forum outside faculty meetings for these purposes might contribute to more productive and efficient faculty meetings. One member proposed that, in addition, the FEC chair regularly be given the opportunity to discuss the FEC's agenda at faculty meetings.

Professor Umphrey raised the question of whether the president would be likely to consult with the chair in the event of a crisis. President Martin said that she would be more likely to consult with the FEC as a whole, when possible, in order to be able to consider a range of voices. On the other hand, she noted, many crises during her time at Amherst have required that she consult very quickly with those who have most expertise in the field—for example, in the area of sexual misconduct or public health—and then to keep the Committee of Six informed and seek the members' views. So much depends on the nature of the crisis, the president noted. Professor Vaughan expressed a preference for providing the president with the views of the entire FEC, when consulted. He feels that attention should be focused on the formal administrative role of the chair, and warned against creating a position that would lead to a single individual having too much power. The members agreed to consider the role of the chair of the FEC further at the committee's next meeting.

Discussion turned to the topic of the procedures ([Faculty Handbook \(III., A., final paragraph\)](#)) used for considering tenure cases for appointments at the level of professor and associate professor with tenure. Provost Epstein noted that hiring at this level has become a more common practice in recent years. She informed the members that, in her view and in the experience of those in her office, constituting ad hoc committees to conduct these reviews and to make recommendations, in collaboration with departments, is unnecessarily complex and time-consuming; leads to work that is duplicative; and places significant, undue burdens on departments and the tenured faculty members who serve on ad hoc committees. She proposed that the procedures followed for tenure cases for candidates for tenure at the level of professor and associate professor with tenure follow, to the extent possible, the regular procedures for tenure cases at the college, dispensing with the process of appointing an ad hoc committee and relying on departments to assemble the tenure dossier and to make the recommendation for tenure. After discussing the details of the current process—which involves appointing an ad hoc committee comprising one tenured member of the department that is recommending the hire/tenure, and three tenured faculty members from related departments—the committee agreed that this change makes sense. The members decided to make a motion to revise the *Faculty Handbook* accordingly. It was emphasized that the TPC (if approved) will follow the standard process of reviewing the letters from external reviewers early in the tenure process, with the option of requesting additional letters if it is decided that they are needed.

The committee next discussed the question of whether research students should be asked to provide teaching evaluations—in particular, retrospective letters—for the purpose of reappointment and tenure reviews. Provost Epstein explained that tenure-track faculty members, particularly those in STEM fields, have long viewed their work with research students as an important part of their teaching that should be represented in the evaluation of their teaching effectiveness at the time of reappointment and tenure. At present, if such students do not take a class with a professor, they are not solicited for an evaluation. These would include students who work in a faculty member's lab, but who do not have the professor for a course, either during the academic year or in the summer, Provost Epstein commented. It was noted that faculty in the arts, humanities, and social sciences also have research students. The members discussed the criteria that might be used to decide whether a research student should be solicited for an evaluation, as some may interact with a faculty member for a brief period of time, while others may do so for a couple of weeks, several months, a semester, or a year. The committee also noted that virtually all research students who work in faculty members' labs are paid, and some concern was raised that this structure could lead to negative teaching evaluations under circumstances relating to the pay rate set by a faculty supervisor, for example. The members agreed that, if evaluations were to be solicited from research students, it must be for work that is substantive and takes place over an extended time period. The question was raised as to who would decide which students would meet any criteria that might be set, and who would track student work to make sure that only those students who meet the criteria were solicited.

Continuing the discussion, one member wondered whether thesis students who don't complete a thesis and don't convert their honors course to a special topics course, and thus do not receive a grade, should be asked to do an evaluation; this is not the case now, the member noted. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez suggested that one criterion for soliciting an evaluation should be that the student has worked with the faculty member for at least a semester or its equivalent. Professor Martini expressed the view that students with whom a faculty interacts as part of the Summer Science Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) Program or the Gregory S. Call Research Program should be asked to provide evaluations if a change is made. Another suggestion was to ask candidates for reappointment and tenure to provide a list of research students from whom they want the department to solicit retrospective letters—in much the way tenure candidates are asked to provide names of colleagues who might be asked to write “colleague letters.” The members agreed that, to move the conversation forward, it would be helpful to develop a proposal for how best to structure a system of having research students provide evaluation of teaching. Professor Clotfelter agreed to draft such a proposal to share with the members as a starting point for further discussion.

Discussion turned to the process for considering [a letter from Professor Fong](#) in which she made some proposals regarding committee service. The members agreed that, given that the FEC will take up the issue of the committee structure during the next academic year, the letter should be forwarded to that committee once the FEC is constituted. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty