

The twenty-fourth 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 25, 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 and Associate Dean of the Faculty Dhingra, who served as the recorder for this meeting. The meeting began with discussion of a personnel matter.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Schroeder Rodríguez asked about paying students for service on committees, including the Campus Safety Advisory Committee, which recently concluded its work. He noted that the Association of Amherst Students (AAS) had recently passed a policy to pay students for some of its committee work. The provost and president responded that the administration is looking into the new AAS policy, and that it is not clear that the college can use funds for this purpose. (Later, the *Amherst Student* reported that the AAS voted to delay the policy, given various legal and other concerns.) President Martin commented that the AAS also has a policy of not funding student organizations for work that isn’t open to all students. Provost Epstein said that she had been surprised by the AAS’s recent policy decision about committee work and expressed the view that it could be problematic to start down a path of paying students to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Continuing, Professor Umphrey posed a number of questions. She asked if the provost would provide some information about the origins and purpose of the Committee of Six’s annual meetings with tenure-track faculty, as the committee would be having such a meeting the next morning. Provost Epstein said that, some years ago, the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty had requested that the Committee of Six meet with its members, as well as with all tenure-track faculty. The group had also asked to have meetings with the president and provost. Originally, the thought was that these meetings would happen twice a year, but the Committee of Six later decided that the meetings should take place once a year. The meeting with the Committee of Six provides an opportunity for tenure-track faculty to ask questions and to learn about the committee’s work, Provost Epstein noted. Often, there have been questions about the tenure process as well as other subjects. Professor Manion commented that it would be much more effective if this type of meeting took place in the fall with the Committee of Six. The provost noted that the committee could certainly make a request that the meetings occur in the fall, however, it is her understanding that the group preferred that the meetings take place in the spring this year.

Professor Umphrey then asked if it might be possible to have a celebration when students turn in their theses, noting that other schools organize such events. Provost Epstein suggested writing to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) about this idea. Concluding, Professor Umphrey thanked the provost for organizing the “Comeback-from-COVID” lunches for faculty, which will be held in Frost Library in the Center for Humanistic Inquiry (CHI) Think Tank. The provost said that thanks should go to Associate Provost Tobin and to Dee Brace, who is serving as a temporary assistant to the director of the CHI, who worked on the lunches.

President Martin next informed the members that the student anti-racism advisory group has raised concern that the student prizes that are given at the end of the year are tied to the allocation of gifts to departments that were made in the past, and thus are not equitably distributed. The students wonder whether the college can make sure that every department can afford to offer a prize. Provost Epstein commented that all departments offer prizes for the best thesis each year; some departments have many other prizes, while some have fewer. One or two programs might not offer any prizes, she noted. Provost Epstein commented that there is more of a disparity among departments when it comes to the undergraduate prizes that are given at the undergraduate award ceremony, in comparison to those that are given at Senior Assembly. President Martin asked what the smallest dollar amount is for prizes. Provost Epstein said that she believes that all prizes should be at least \$500, but she is not sure that is the case. The provost agreed to find out more about these matters.

Professor Vaughan next asked if it would be possible to learn more about the status of the presidential search, while continuing to maintain confidentiality. Provost Epstein responded that more will be learned after the meeting of the trustees that will take place over commencement weekend. Professor Umphrey, a member of the search committee, informed the members that interviews with the finalists will take place very soon.

Continuing with “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Manion asked how long tents can

remain up for teaching purposes. President Martin responded that the tents may stay up until close to when classes end, but not quite until May 13; staff need to take down some of the tents in order to put others up, and facilities is currently short staffed, she noted.

Turning to another topic, the president informed the members that the college has purchased a house on Sunset Avenue that will become the residence of the next president of Amherst. The house, which is within walking distance of the campus, will provide more privacy than the current president's house, which will soon sit between two academic buildings—the new Lyceum and Morgan Hall. Extensive infrastructure renovations are needed to the new house, though this work will not be completed until the end of the new president's first semester at the college. President Martin said that it is her hope that the current president's house can become a place for the faculty to gather, both informally and for more scheduled events such as lunches, informal gatherings, or other meetings. At the same time, the current president's house will probably continue to function as a space in which the president can entertain larger groups, and some have suggested that alumni might make use of the space on some weekends. No definitive decisions have been made as to the use, the president said. Professor Umphrey expressed enthusiasm for using the current president's house in the ways that had been described, commenting on the benefits for faculty in regard to furthering opportunities for social interaction, in particular. President Martin said that her proposal centers around this use.

Conversation turned to finalizing proposed revisions to the language for reappointment procedures in the *Faculty Handbook* so as to better align the language with current practice. The committee made some minor additional revisions to the proposal. It was agreed to bring the proposal to the faculty for approval at the next faculty meeting.

The committee then discussed whether, to inform the evaluation of teaching effectiveness for reappointment and tenure, letters to evaluate teaching should be solicited from students who do research work with faculty members during the summer or over the academic year. It has been suggested that it would be helpful to do so, as some of these students' experiences might not otherwise be captured in the reappointment and tenure processes. The committee decided that it would raise this issue with tenure-track colleagues during the members' meeting with them the next day. If such a procedure were put in place, it would be important to have a clear understanding of what is meant by "research" in this context. A member noted that, in the sciences, faculty have a great deal of "face time" with students over the summer, unlike in the humanities. The member doesn't know how to think about non-science students in this regard and expressed the view that the model in the sciences lends itself well to generating meaningful letters that are based on substantive experiences. Another member questioned the need for letters from research students, wondering what would be gained from the envisioned letters—that is, what new information would be learned.

Continuing the conversation, another member noted that, based on conversations with some tenure-track faculty, the member believes that most research students, at least in the humanities, also take courses with the faculty member with whom they are doing research. Such students often discuss their summer experiences in their course evaluations. The member noted that, on the other hand, for Summer Science Undergraduate Research (SURF) students, who haven't yet chosen a major, it is not uncommon for a student to have not taken a course with the faculty member. It was seen as being important to have letters that discuss the instruction and mentoring that takes place when this is the case. The member commented that, although the number of students in this category is relatively small, they can provide a very different type of letter about their summer experience. Another member, who had also consulted with other faculty about this issue, said it would be important to distinguish between student work that is involved and has mentoring that is akin to teaching, versus that which involves basic support functions.

In regard to whether letters from research students should be solicited only from science students, the provost said that she did not understand why they would not be solicited from students who have collaborated with faculty in the humanities and social sciences. She noted that Gregory S. Call Academic Interns, for example, work with students for six weeks over the summer and meet with faculty at least once a week. A member commented that, in the humanities, the Gregory S. Call Research Fellows are all doing honors work, which is already captured in the letters that they write as thesis students. One member commented that, in the sciences, there are Greg Call students who are not doing honors work, and that

they would not be solicited for an evaluation if they were not also taking a course with the research mentor. Another question that was raised was whether faculty should be able to opt in or opt out of having letters solicited from research students, if this process were put in place. One member expressed the view that it should be possible to search for research students in Workday, based on whatever criteria might be established; it would be preferable that the students just be contacted, rather than allowing an opt in/opt out process. Provost Epstein noted that the question remains as to whether research students should be solicited, commenting that some tenure-track faculty members have been concerned for years that the work that they do with students over the summer is not recognized.

Concluding the discussion, some members noted that it appears that, in the humanities and some social sciences, the need for letters from research students seems less pressing, but that it could be informative to solicit them for science faculty. A member commented that it could also be informative to solicit letters from Schupf Fellows, who work with faculty in other disciplines. Provost Epstein said that those students may not have taken a course with their faculty mentor, so that the fellows' experiences might not be captured through other evaluations. She expressed the view that it does not seem like a good idea to limit the proposal to solicit letters from research students in the sciences only. A member commented that, if the concern is a lack of compensation for mentoring and teaching labor, gathering additional teaching evaluations seems like a strange way of addressing this issue. Another member noted that some faculty want to have evaluations from students who have excelled at research. Summer programs are a double-edged sword, another member noted; they require a great deal from faculty. A couple of members noted that many tenure-track faculty do not want to let students down and can feel pressured to take research students, particularly as the college has made more funding available to support this activity, even if chairs advise them not to. The money and opportunity is there, and tenure-track faculty can find it difficult to say "no." Provost Epstein said that her office is hearing the opposite. Faculty seem to want more funding to support more research students and more academic interns, for example. A member expressed the view that faculty who will be on campus often want more research students, while those who are doing research in the field may not. The members agreed that, to inform their consideration of this issue, they would discuss the proposal at the meeting with tenure-track faculty to learn their views; the feedback that they receive can then be shared at the next Committee of Six meeting.

Conversation turned to the system that is currently being used to solicit teaching evaluations for tenured faculty (see *Faculty Handbook* [\(IV., B., 2.\)](#)) Provost Epstein reiterated that the automated system has proven to be a failure in regard to student participation. Since the current system cannot be used in Workday, some kind of change is needed in any case. Some members questioned the value and purpose of the evaluations, and it was noted that, currently, there is no incentive (other than professional ethos) for tenured faculty to pay attention to them. Some members wondered if it would be preferable to return to using paper evaluations or to use Google forms. Provost Epstein expressed the view that the only way that student participation will increase is by setting aside time in class for doing the evaluations. One member commented that a return to paper would be preferable, as she does not want her students bringing laptops to class. The provost said that she understands that other institutions have found that, unless grades are withheld from students who do complete evaluations, participation can be poor. The provost suggested that it would be helpful to bring forward a proposal to the faculty that time be set aside in class for students to complete evaluations. The members felt that at this point, it would be preferable to forward this issue to the new Faculty Executive Committee, for consideration in the next academic year.

The committee next discussed the ideal timing for the next faculty meeting. The provost noted that the CEP intends to bring its proposal for revising the system for awarding Latin honors to the Committee of Six soon. Given the complexity and importance of this issue, some members wondered whether this conversation should begin now, as it is likely to carry over to the fall. The committee would not meet again until May 9, it was noted, and some members felt that there might not be enough time to discuss the proposal before it potentially could be brought to the faculty. Provost Epstein informed the committee that it is unclear whether the CEP will be ready to forward the proposal to the Committee of Six by May 9, when the members next meet. Doing so would be essential if this is to be brought to the faculty this year, she noted. It was agreed that May 17 should be held as a date for a possible faculty meeting, though, in regard

to the Latin honors proposal, a discussion could take place at the last faculty meeting of the year on May 26.

The meeting ended with a review of departmental tenure criteria documents that have been submitted by departments thus far, in response to the committee's request. While the members agreed that many of the documents are excellent, they suggested that the provost share feedback about some issues with a small number of departments.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty