

The thirty-third meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2020–2021 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 p.m. on Monday, April 5, 2021. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors del Moral, Kingston, Leise, Manion, Trapani, and Umphrey; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with President Martin informing the members that Norm Jones, chief equity and Inclusion officer, will be leaving his position at the college in May to help lead a foundation that his family established recently. Among other priorities, the foundation supports Black men pursuing leadership positions in secondary education, the president said. She noted N. Jones's foundational accomplishments as Amherst's first chief equity and inclusion officer and his many contributions to the work of the college more broadly, as a member of the senior staff. She also expressed gratitude and wished him well as he embarks on an exciting new opportunity. On behalf of the faculty, the committee echoed these sentiments and thanked N. Jones for his leadership and accomplishment in building the college's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and exceptional work on behalf of Amherst faculty, staff, and students. President Martin said that a national search will soon be launched for N. Jones's successor and that she is speaking with Professor Hart, faculty equity and inclusion officer, about taking on the role of interim chief equity and inclusion officer, as needed. Provost Epstein, noting her recent announcement that Professor Dhingra will join her office on July 1 as associate provost and associate dean of the faculty, said that plans are also under way to appoint a new faculty equity and inclusion officer to succeed him.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Kingston noted that the recent announcement about the college's plans for an in-person commencement did not mention the faculty, leading him to ask if there is a role envisioned for professors in this event. President Martin responded that the college is eager for faculty to participate, but only if they feel comfortable doing so. Students have indicated that they would be very excited to have faculty participate in the in-person commencement, she noted.

Continuing with questions, Professor Manion asked why the college has not made any proactive statements in favor of transgender students in recent weeks. Nationally, there are more than thirty anti-trans bills before state legislatures, which directly and indirectly affect Amherst students. It is consistent with the college's non-discrimination policy to make a statement, yet even the college social media accounts have been silent—something that is quite noticeable since Transgender Day of Visibility just passed without a mention. Furthermore, Professor Manion asked if consideration can be given to producing a practical guide for faculty about transgender issues, including the resources the college makes available for transgender students, so that faculty might better understand and support trans students at the college. Professor Manion noted that trans students are struggling with access to safe and affirming environments, access to healthcare, and even homelessness. These challenges have been exacerbated due to both the pandemic and a climate of discrimination in which many states are threatening or removing their rights. President Martin and Provost Epstein expressed support for Professor Manion's proposal and said that they would move it forward. Professor Umphrey underscored Professor Manion's points and commented that this is a particularly precarious time for many students, noting that there are different forms of distress related to homelessness, for example, that the college could address. President Martin agreed and said that Amherst may draw on its pandemic emergency fund to provide additional support, and that she and others will look into this set of issues and determine how best to help.

Professor Umphrey, prompted by a recent discussion that the committee had had with the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty, which had touched on ways in which the pandemic is affecting pre-tenure colleagues, asked a series of questions. She inquired whether the college is considering the following: reflecting on the impact that the pandemic has had on the Amherst community; thinking about what has been learned from the COVID-19 experience; considering continuing needs that have arisen and possible changes that might result; and thinking about ways in which Amherst's response to the pandemic could inform future planning. President Martin said that conversations of this kind are

under way—and will continue—as part of a near-term planning exercise. In regard to the impact of the pandemic on tenure-track faculty specifically, Provost Epstein said that she and President Martin had also met with the consultative group recently and had agreed to survey tenure-track faculty to learn more about the pandemic's impact on them, and their needs going forward. (Both the Committee of Six, alone, and the president and the provost, together, will soon meet with all tenure-track faculty.) The members then turned to personnel matters.

The members turned to consideration of [a letter, sent to the committee by twenty-six tenure-track Amherst faculty in STEM fields](#), requesting that the college examine its research support infrastructure, with the goal of remedying the problems that the scientists had identified. [A letter from the chairs of STEM departments](#) conveying support for this request was also sent to the committee. Provost Epstein expressed appreciation to the signatories of both letters for bringing these matters to the attention of the president, the Committee of Six, and herself in such a helpful and constructive way. Professor Trapani, noting the STEM faculty members' view that some of the issues that they have raised, and perhaps others, are likely having an impact on faculty beyond the STEM fields, said that it may have been with this idea in mind that the request was made to constitute a committee to work on these issues. Provost Epstein expressed the view that the tenure-track faculty basically performed the work of the envisioned committee by identifying the pertinent issues, which can be addressed by the administration. She does not see the need for a committee at this time. Professor Kingston suggested that, procedurally, the first step should be to consult with colleagues in Information Technology and the Grants Office to get their perspectives. In his view, it would then make sense to consider in a systematic way the issues that were described in the letter, and to see which problems could be addressed using current resources and which might necessitate additional support to solve.

Continuing the conversation, the provost said that, while there are a number of complexities involved, for example, when it comes to federal contracts, she and other senior leaders are committed to making improvements. She said that she will coordinate this effort and will communicate with the faculty regularly about progress that is being made. In fact, the provost noted, work is already under way in some offices to address some of the issues that have been raised. Provost Epstein informed the members that she has organized a meeting with Jack Cheney, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty; David Hamilton, chief information officer; Lisa Rutherford, chief policy officer and general counsel; and Kevin Weinman, chief administrative and financial officer, to think through these matters. Plans call for sending a communication to the faculty in the next weeks about what is already being done to address the concerns that have been raised, what can be accomplished in the coming weeks and months, and what will likely take a bit longer to figure out.

Some members then noted that the college has been hiring a large number of stellar STEM faculty who have robust research agendas in recent years, and who require a large amount of funding. Provost Epstein said that, while this is true, there are still more humanities faculty than STEM faculty at the college, and that the research needs of faculty drive resource allocation. Professor Umphrey, while very sympathetic about the needs noted in the letter, expressed some concern that the humanities might suffer, as more and more resources are allocated to STEM faculty. President Martin noted that the college has hired one faculty member into one of the twelve new FTE lines that will be created with gifts as part of the Promise Campaign. Thus far, \$28 million in gifts and pledges have been made to support the new FTEs. Departments cannot hire fast enough to fill replacement positions at the moment, she noted. In addition, President Martin informed the members that, since the college is conscious of the high costs associated with STEM faculty—e.g., having technicians to support their research—funding beyond salary is being raised to support positions in STEM. Hiring in the humanities will not be cut in order to hire STEM faculty, the president said. Concluding the discussion, Professor Trapani commented that having regular communication about the ways in which the college is making progress on addressing the issues raised by

STEM faculty would be welcome. The committee thanked President Martin and Provost Epstein for their responsiveness to the problems that the STEM faculty have identified.

Conversation turned to a draft of an [anti-racism action plan for the provost's division](#) that Provost Epstein shared with the members ahead of the meeting. She noted that the purpose of the plan is to guide the work in the provost's division to confront and remedy racism at all levels, and to foster equity and inclusion. She explained that the Provost's Anti-Racism Leadership Group (which includes, in addition to herself, Sarah Barr, advisor to the provost on campus initiatives and director of the Center for Community Engagement; Jack Cheney, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty and Samuel A. Hitchcock Professor of Mineralogy and Geology; Martin Garnar, director of the library; Emily Griffen, director of the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning; Darryl Harper, director of the Center for Humanistic Inquiry and associate professor of music; Michael Kunichika, director of the Amherst Center for Russian Culture and associate professor of Russian; Austin Sarat, associate provost and associate dean of the of the faculty and William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Jurisprudence and Political Science; and Janet Tobin, associate provost) drafted the plan, which has now been shared with a variety of groups, including department heads and all staff in the division; the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; the Faculty Leadership Committee for the Anti-Racism Plan; and the chairs of academic departments and programs, and now the Committee of Six. Provost Epstein said that the challenge has been to create a plan that will be helpful to the departments and offices within the provost's division, the work of which is quite varied.

Professor Umphrey thanked the provost for sharing the plan with the committee, noting how thoughtful the document is and how much work was clearly involved in developing it. She asked if more details could be provided about allocating resources to support anti-racism, wondering what kinds of resources are envisioned. Provost Epstein said that different forms of support might be provided, depending on the work being undertaken. For example, funding could be offered to bring experts to the college to advise an academic department on reimagining its curriculum, or to help provide training that focuses on the work of a given office, or to provide a department with books for a common read. Professor Umphrey also noted that, at least in her field, no one "anti-racist" perspective can easily be identified. She wondered whether the plan proposes a particular substantive approach to the work it recommends, given that it uses implementation language that refers to "an anti-racist perspective." (A revision was later made to the plan to refer to anti-racist perspectives.) Professor Trapani said that he is pleased to see that anti-racism work will be championed by the provost's division. He asked what structures will be in place for implementing the plan, as this will be critical for helping departments and divisions carry out the work. Provost Epstein said that priorities will need to be set in regard to what will be worked on now, and what will need to wait, as some aspects of the plan will take longer than others to fulfill.

The committee next engaged in a brief conversation about next steps in the members' efforts to charge an ad hoc committee to review matters related to teaching at the college. The members discussed what the focus of the ad hoc committee's work should be, considering whether the charge should focus only on ways to address bias in the teaching evaluation process, or be broader in scope. Most members favored having the ad hoc committee conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of the ways in which Amherst supports the professional development of faculty as teachers, especially with regard to the support, mentoring, and evaluation of tenure-track faculty members. This charge will encompass an examination of the issue of bias as it relates to the evaluation of teaching, it was noted. The members agreed to refine the charge over the course of the next week and to return to a discussion of this matter at their next meeting.

In the time remaining, the committee discussed how it should proceed with the work of clarifying the criteria for tenure at the college. It was agreed that this effort should focus on aligning the language of the *Faculty Handbook* with practice, with the goal of providing greater transparency. Professor Kingston

expressed concern that, at this point in the semester, there will not be enough time to complete this project, which will require a good deal of thought and consultation. Still, all agreed, progress can be made and momentum built during this term. The members decided to return to this topic at their next meeting and, as a first step, to review the tenure criteria of some peer institutions.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty