

The fourth 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, August 10, 2020. 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 the provost suggesting colleagues who might serve on a memorial minute committee for Prosser Gifford. Dean Gifford, Amherst's first dean of the faculty, died on July 5, 2020. The committee agreed that Provost Epstein should proceed with constituting a committee to honor Dean Gifford.

President Martin next informed the members that she would soon be writing to faculty and staff to ensure that everyone is aware that the college plans to move forward with having roughly half of the student body on campus this fall. (At the time of the committee's meeting, a number of colleges and universities had recently reversed decisions to bring students to campus, instead deciding to go completely remote for the fall semester, or limiting further the number of students they would have on campus.) The president informed the members of her plans to host a webinar for students and their families that evening. The event's purpose is to reiterate Amherst's expectations for the fall and to make sure that students and their families are comfortable with the rules that have been put in place, and will adhere to them.

Continuing her remarks, the president noted that students will begin arriving at Amherst on Saturday, and that classes will begin on August 24, as planned. President Martin stressed, as she later wrote in [her note to faculty and staff](#), that Amherst has "the responsibility to provide students with the best possible education and the greatest possible chance to succeed." She reminded the members that Amherst students and other students across the country found remote learning very challenging last spring. Many struggled to do their academic work because of a lack of privacy, poor internet service, and/or family responsibilities. President Martin emphasized that the college has a responsibility to extend itself so students can be on campus. She also commented that the college has spent months on preparations to bring students back, including putting robust procedures in place to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, to the degree possible.

Professor Trapani asked why Amherst is encouraging faculty to teach their classes remotely, but has decided to bring many students to campus anyway. Provost Epstein said that approximately two-thirds of Amherst faculty members have indicated that they will teach remotely, but that it is hoped that students will have many opportunities to interact with faculty in person—in some classes, in small groups, and in office hours, for example. She emphasized the importance of having faculty come to campus, encouraging those who can to do so.

Continuing with questions, Professor Umphrey asked if the tents that the college has rented may be used for office hours and advising, or whether they are reserved for teaching only. She also wonders what the system will be to reserve the tents. Provost Epstein responded that Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, and Addy Free, registrar, are working on issues surrounding the tents and will send out [a message soon that will address these and other questions](#).

Provost Epstein next turned to the topic of Title IX policy. She reminded the members that, in May, the U.S. Department of Education had released new Title IX regulations, requiring all educational institutions that receive federal funding to make changes to their policies related to sexual harassment by August 14, 2020. The provost then shared updates to Amherst's policies related to sexual assault and other forms of sexual harassment. Over the summer, the Title IX Team, in collaboration with her office and the Offices of Student Affairs and Human Resources, developed [an interim Title IX policy and interim Title IX grievance process](#), both of which are applicable to all students, faculty, and staff, she noted. These measures will take effect on August 14. The president and provost informed the members that, due to the short timeframe within which institutions had to update their policies, and the disruption caused by COVID-19, the college decided to develop interim policies. Both factors made it impossible to engage the Amherst community in a conversation about this important matter within the time allotted. The interim Title IX policy and grievance process will allow Amherst to engage in those conversations

over the coming year and to make adjustments, where possible, President Martin and Provost Epstein said. Final policies will then be implemented for the next academic year.

Among other rules, the new regulations require that institutions have a consistent standard of evidence by which all Title IX complaints will be reviewed, the provost noted. The interim Title IX grievance process provides for the use of the “preponderance of the evidence” (or, “more likely than not”) standard. For faculty, this represents a shift from the “clear and convincing” standard that is otherwise applicable, as described in the *Faculty Handbook*. The rationale for the decision to adjust the standard of evidence in faculty cases, rather than student cases, relates to students being the primary users of the formal process for Title IX matters. The preponderance of the evidence standard is used in all student conduct matters and has been the standard of evidence in the student sexual misconduct process since at least 2013, Provost Epstein said. (In an email to the community sent on August 14, Laurie Frankl, Title IX coordinator, outlined other [changes that have been made to accommodate the new requirements](#)).

Continuing the conversation, the president and provost noted that the Title IX Review Committee, which comprises students, faculty, and staff, will engage the community in conversation about the interim policy and grievance process and then draft a final Title IX policy and grievance process that continues to meet the college’s legal obligations, and the needs of the Amherst community.

Professor Umphrey, who said she understands the necessity of putting interim changes in place, also expressed deep concern about the consequential change to the standard of evidence. She noted the need for a good deal of conversation about this issue, and she asked if there is a date certain by which the Committee of Six can revisit this policy change. Provost Epstein, who said that she is also concerned about the change to the standard of evidence, noted that this topic will be on the committee’s agenda during the second semester, following the conversations with the Amherst community.

Conversation turned to the question of the time for faculty meetings this year, an issue raised by Professor Fong in [a note that she had sent recently to the committee](#). In that communication, she pointed out that the date and time of the first faculty meeting (September 1, at 7:30 P.M.) of this academic year is a time when classes are in session; this year’s academic schedule includes 8 P.M. sections for classes and sections, Professor Fong noted. She suggested holding faculty meetings sometime during the time reserved for “community hours” (Tuesday or Thursday, from 5:10 P.M. to 7:50 P.M.). The provost noted that this time has been set aside for co-curricular activities for students, including, possibly, performances that would involve arts faculty, and not for community hours. Professor Trapani expressed support for looking beyond the typical evening meeting time and trying to find a block earlier in the day in which courses are not being taught. As a former member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Alternative Meeting Hours, which was charged in the spring of 2016 with examining the feasibility of creating a weekly two-hour block during the day that could be set aside for faculty meetings and community scheduling, he said that he is aware of the challenges that are associated with finding an alternative time. Given that the academic schedule has been modified because of needs surrounding remote learning this fall, he wonders if new possibilities might emerge, however.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Trapani suggested that Friday afternoons, a potential time for faculty meetings that has been dismissed in the past because of the fear that there would be low attendance, might be workable, particularly since colleagues presumably won’t be traveling on Fridays. The provost noted that a number of classes are being held on Fridays up until 5:00 P.M. Professor Manion also expressed support for finding a time for faculty meetings earlier in the day. Provost Epstein said that it is possible that Mondays or Wednesdays earlier in the evening might work, but that she would need to confirm this idea with Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services. Professor Umphrey wondered if the time slot reserved for first-year seminars in the fall might be available for faculty meetings and community hours in the spring. Provost Epstein said that this slot is very heavily used and would not be available for faculty meetings. The members agreed to have the first faculty meeting at the regular meeting time and to explore whether alternatives might be found

going forward. The committee next reviewed a draft faculty meeting agenda for September 1 and voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward it to the faculty.

Professor Umphrey next asked a number of questions about the anti-racism plan that the president had outlined in [her email to the community of August 3, 2020](#). She applauded the president's statement of values and energetic program surrounding this important and pressing issue. Professor Umphrey then asked three questions on behalf of colleagues. First, is it expected that the bias-reporting and response protocol will encompass incidents occurring in the classroom? If so, to what extent should faculty weigh in when the proposed process intersects with academic freedom and freedom of expression? Second, she asked about the process for awarding the remaining three FTEs of the five senior faculty FTEs requested by the president and approved by the board of trustees to help diversify the faculty, as well as future FTEs allocated via the usual Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) processes. Professor Umphrey expressed concern that some academic departments, particularly smaller ones with less curricular flexibility, and those that focus on disciplines with competitors whose salary scales significantly outpace those of liberal arts colleges, may find it challenging to identify and recruit Black and Latinx scholars. This could mean that such departments end up with fewer FTEs in the long run, as they may not be among the departments that, as President Martin's letter indicates may be required, have "already made progress toward racial diversity using existing lines or have filled one of the open new lines." Professor Umphrey pointed out that, under the plan, such departments will get preference when the president and provost review recommendations from the CEP for searches. Would departments that had followed the 2018 Curriculum Committee's recommendation to hire faculty with expertise in underrepresented regions of the world now be disadvantaged when requesting new or replacement FTES, she wondered. Lastly, Professor Umphrey asked how to reconcile the important contributions of the Instagram site *BlackAmherstSpeaks*, calling the community's attention to the many abrasive and wearing incidents of racism faced by Amherst Students, with some posts that highlight individual faculty and staff in ways that make it possible to identify them — and which some faculty and staff believe were referenced in President Martin's letter. Those who may be mentioned in social media posts (by name or otherwise) cannot easily find ways to respond, Professor Umphrey said, placing particularly staff and pre-tenure faculty in a vulnerable position.

Responding to the questions in reverse order, President Martin commented that there are no examples that are used on the Instagram site that she has not heard multiple times before from students during office hours and in other venues. In her view, the community should first concentrate on showing Black students that Amherst cares about what students are telling us. In regard to the FTE allocation process, the president expressed concern that only two of the FTE lines for senior hires of Black and Latinx faculty have been used since an invitation to submit proposals for them was extended to departments in 2016. The faculty needs to do better in the work of diversifying the faculty, and the college needs to take bold steps to provide support for this effort, including by exerting some pressure. She informed the members that Amherst is committed to providing the resources that are needed to recruit and retain outstanding faculty of color. In regard to the three remaining FTE lines, the president said that it is possible that the college will now consider hires of assistant professors at the advanced stage in this rank. President Martin also noted that, when reviewing proposals for these and other FTEs, the provost and she would continue to take many factors into account when reviewing the CEP's recommendations, not only one. Addressing the question about the proposed bias-reporting and response protocol, the president said that the faculty will consider issues that touch on the academic freedom and freedom of expression in the classroom. She noted that the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion believes that the bias-reporting and response protocol should not be limited to student-to-student interactions. If it is, students will continue to suffer indignities in and outside the classroom, it is felt. President Martin informed the members that the anti-bias and response protocol that is being developed is being modeled on the system at the University of Chicago. Professor Umphrey said that she is pleased to learn that the faculty will have the opportunity to weigh in on the anti-bias and response protocol at the proposal stage, in the contexts that have been described, and to have an impact on the outcome. Professor Kingston commented that any part of a bias-reporting and response protocol that seeks to regulate speech in the classroom must first be discussed by

the faculty. He also feels that it should be made clear that anonymous posts on social media are explicitly excluded from consideration in the tenure and promotion process.

Returning to the question of diversifying the faculty, President Martin expressed support for making use of cross-departmental cluster hiring, which has been a successful approach used by other institutions, she noted. Moving away from thinking in departmental terms and seeding interdisciplinary domains would be beneficial on multiple fronts, Professor del Moral noted, commenting that she supports a cluster approach that would bring Black and brown faculty to Amherst in cohorts. Under such a model, faculty are hired with peers and can explore topics collaboratively under such a structure. Bringing a senior colleague to the college, who then attracts promising scholars in the field who are at earlier stages of their careers, is an effective and helpful strategy, Professor del Moral noted. President Martin commented that hiring in clusters takes coordination, time, and effort, but that the college is committed to investing in this and other ways of building a faculty that more closely resembles the student body and the country. Additional FTE lines can likely be made available for this purpose, she said.

Conversation turned to the proposal from the leaders of the Black Student Union (BSU) to revise the college's [Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#) to address the intersections of harmful and harassing speech. The BSU has provided the committee with examples from some other institutions that bar the use of racial epithets and racially derogatory remarks and set some limits on free speech that is threatening, potentially violent, and/or constitutes harassment. President Martin said that she agrees with the students' view that members of the community should be held accountable when they demean or harass entire groups. The students have asked that these ideas be reflected in the college's Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom. President Martin noted that any revisions of the statement require a vote of the faculty.

Provost Epstein reminded the members of the view of last year's Committee of Six that, before any proposals for change within the academic realm are brought to the faculty, it would be useful and informative to have some preliminary conversations—in particular on bias reporting and the relationship between harmful and harassing language and academic freedom—with faculty and students in small groups. In this way, intellectual exchange could take place, laying the groundwork for shaping proposals that might later be brought to the faculty. This year's committee agreed that the relationship between harmful and harassing language and the college's Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom is a very important issue for the faculty to address soon. Professor del Moral asked about the best way to move forward. At the committee's request, Professors Umphrey and Manion agreed to review the statements on academic and expressive freedom of other colleges and universities, including examples of other statements beyond those that had been provided by the BSU, and to bring a proposal for a revision of Amherst's statement to the committee for review and discussion. The other members thanked Professors Manion and Umphrey for taking on this work, which all agreed must be thought through very carefully. Professor Manion said that she looks forward to building on the work of the BSU, which she appreciates greatly. Professor Umphrey agreed and also noted the importance of reviewing other institutions' statements and policies systematically, and by so doing, giving the process broader reach.

Discussion turned to the committee's agenda for the fall. The members reviewed a list of issues provided by Associate Provost Tobin, some of which represented carryover from the committee's work of previous years, and considered the time that will need to be devoted to reviewing personnel cases. Professor Leise suggested that the committee focus on a set of issues that fall under the umbrella of attracting and retaining faculty, including several that touch on the evaluation of teaching. Provost Epstein wondered if appointing an ad hoc committee to consider the evaluation of teaching, would be a good approach to beginning to address this issue. She noted that the ad hoc committee that had developed the common teaching evaluation form, which had been chaired by Professor Kingston, had been very effective. That ad hoc committee had a narrow charge—to develop the form—she noted, and had not been asked to address the evaluation process broadly. Potentially, the service burdens of

faculty, and possible inequities, which is an issue that touches on evaluation, would be another matter that the committee could consider, the members noted. Beyond the regular work of the Committee of Six, and the attention it must devote to matters arising out of the pandemic, the members agreed to make anti-racism work its top priority, including the intersection of academic and expressive freedom and harmful and harassing speech and the bias-reporting and response protocol. Professor Manion expressed hope that the faculty will approach anti-racism work expansively and positively.

In regard to appointing an ad hoc committee to focus on the evaluation of teaching, Professor Umphrey said that she supports doing so. She feels that this is the right moment to think broadly about the evaluation of teaching, particularly as so many tenure-track faculty members are expressing concerns about equity in relation to this and other processes. Professor Umphrey recommended that a tenure-track faculty member be invited to serve, if an ad hoc committee is constituted. Provost Epstein concurred that having an ad hoc committee focus on this work would be desirable, while also noting that there are not many faculty members available to serve on additional committees at this point. Professor Kingston said that he is nervous about the prospect of burdening faculty with additional responsibilities at this challenging time. He wonders whether this is a moment to try to innovate, or to focus on keeping things afloat and doing the best job possible. He also expressed the view that it would be helpful to have the new common teaching evaluation form in use for a longer period before turning to an assessment of the evaluation process.

Referencing the long list of possible agenda items on which the committee would not have time to focus this semester, Professors Trapani and del Moral expressed support for exploring a structure in which one Committee of Six focuses on faculty personnel matters, while another addresses the executive committee work. In this way, more could be accomplished, they feel.

Professor Trapani next asked whether the committee should meet soon with the student leaders of the BSU to continue the conversation/relationship that was begun by the last Committee of Six. The other members expressed the view that it would be best for the committee to begin its work on the relevant issues before having such a meeting. All supported meeting with the students in the future.

The meeting concluded with the members asking the provost to remind the faculty about the college's policy on [Surreptitious or Unauthorized Observable Recording of Others](#), a part of the *Student Code of Conduct*, and to encourage professors to include a link to the policy on their syllabi. The members reiterated that doing so is particularly important, given the risks and challenges associated with teaching politically sensitive content in a remote environment. Provost Epstein agreed to do so at the September 1 faculty meeting. She noted that a recent issue of the provost's newsletter had also provided information about this topic. (In addition, a discussion of this issue appears in the Committee of Six minutes of July 27, 2020, as does a link to the board of directors of the Association for Asian Studies' [helpful statement on this issue](#).) In addition, as noted earlier, Hanna Bliss, director of institutional student engagement, has been asked to speak with students from China about this issue.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty