

The fifth 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 24, 2020. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors del Moral, Kingston, Leise, Trapani, and Umphrey; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder. Professor Manion was absent.

The meeting began with President Martin commenting that the moving-in process for students had gone very well, and that it is wonderful to see them back on campus. She also informed the committee that a member of the college's custodial staff recently tested positive for COVID-19, the first staff case and second overall case this semester on campus. President Martin said that the staff member is at home, isolating, and is currently asymptomatic and feeling well.

Under "Questions from Committee Members, Professor del Moral asked about the status of plans to send a survey to all faculty and staff at the college to seek demographic information that can inform the college's efforts surrounding equity and inclusion. Provost Epstein said that she would check in with Norm Jones, chief equity, and inclusion officer, to learn more about the timetable for the project.

Professor Kingston noted the consternation caused to some faculty by the college's recent determination that, due to laws governing local employment and tax responsibility, any Amherst student who is residing outside the United States, including those who are studying remotely, are unable to work for the college. He asked if Amherst will make efforts to navigate processes that would allow international students to work for the college in the spring. Professor Kingston informed the members that the economics department employs many international students as teaching assistants and graders. He pointed out that enabling international students to continue to work in these and other roles will help keep them involved in the economics department, and the Amherst community more broadly, during the time in which the pandemic is preventing them from being on campus. Provost Epstein said that she recognizes and regrets this situation for international students, and domestic students who are living abroad, but that the college has little leeway where tax laws and other barriers to paying international students at this time are involved. She reminded the members that international students who are studying remotely, but who are still living in the United States, may still work for the college.

Professor Kingston also asked whether international students' financial-aid packages, specifically the amount of their family contribution, are being adjusted if they are unable to come to the United States. Provost Epstein said that she would look into this matter and report back to the committee. (Matt McGann, dean of admission and financial aid, later informed the provost that all students who are learning remotely, whether they are doing so in the United States or outside the country, have had their financial aid adjusted. Students who are studying remotely do not pay for room and board, and they receive an enhanced personal allowance to account for increased expenses that result from not being in residence at Amherst. Also, all students have seen their term-time work expectation replaced with Amherst College scholarship.)

Continuing with questions, Professor Umphrey asked if students will be kept informed when professors decide to shift classes from being in person to remote, noting that some students are upset about such changes. Provost Epstein said that students will be informed. She noted that it is difficult to know the exact number of such shifts before the add/drop period concludes. Another complication has been that some faculty members have decided to change modalities without informing the registrar's office. The provost said that this problem came to light because some faculty who had said initially that they would be teaching in person did not ask to be tested for COVID-19, a requirement for those teaching on campus. As of Friday afternoon, 32 percent of the faculty appeared to be teaching in

person. Also, as of Friday, one-fifth of students who are in residence did not have any in-person classes, Provost Epstein said. At least two professors let her know that they had been exposed to COVID-19 and would be returning to in-person instruction once they had completed the necessary quarantine period. Provost Epstein said that she continues to hope that colleagues, over time, will become more confident that the campus is safe, and will choose to teach in person and/or to meet with students in small groups and in office hours on campus. Provost Epstein informed the members that she will keep them informed about these statistics.

Turning to another topic, as a precursor to the envisioned substantive work on the issue of service burdens being placed on the faculty, Professor Trapani suggested that it would be helpful for the provost's office to find better ways to track each faculty member's record of service. In reviewing his own history of committee service in the documents that have been provided to the Committee of Six to inform the process of making appointments to committees, he noticed that some of his assignments were not represented. Completing this logistical work of having accurate records of service would be a good way to prepare for the consideration of this issue, in his view. Provost Epstein noted that her office currently must rely on antiquated systems to track faculty members' college-wide service. The expectation is that the ability to track service will improve a great deal following the launch of the Workday system in January, she noted. Professor del Moral said that, at the departmental level, she finds it useful, as chair, to document colleagues' department and college service by asking everyone about their assignments and maintaining a simple spreadsheet. In this way, she can get a sense of her colleagues' service burdens during a given semester, and keeps this in mind when assigning additional departmental responsibilities. At the committee's request, Professor del Moral later shared the spreadsheet that she had created with the members, who felt it was a helpful tool. The committee suggested sharing this document with department chairs, as well, and Provost Epstein agreed to do so.

The provost next informed the members that research on alternative times for faculty meetings this fall has revealed that the traditional time for the meetings (the first and third Tuesdays of the month, at 7:30 P.M.) presents the fewest conflicts with the teaching schedule. This semester only two faculty members, both of whom are visitors, are teaching at this time, she noted. The members then approved the following dates (at 7:30 P.M.) for possible faculty meetings: September 1 (already confirmed), September 15, October 6, October 20, November 17, December 1, and December 15. The committee then reviewed proposals for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Stipend competition.

At 3:00 P.M., Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, joined the meeting to review the results of the 2019–2020 Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey. J. Barba noted that the COACHE program is housed at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education and offers one of the most well-known surveys for exploring the job satisfaction of faculty. He informed the members that Amherst has participated in this survey since 2013, and that the 2020 survey was administered in February and March, and was sent to all faculty, including all tenure-line faculty, visiting faculty, and lecturers. Prior to the meeting, the committee had been given the Chief Academic Officer Preview, a report that provides survey respondents' overall satisfaction with twenty-five areas of faculty work. Provost Epstein said that she plans to hold open meetings for faculty about the survey results and to post the preview report on a password-protected site for faculty. She also plans to hold separate meetings with chairs of academic departments and programs, untenured faculty, and associate professors. In regard to the latter, it was noted that faculty at this rank were the most negative about their experience at Amherst in their

responses to the survey.

Continuing, J. Barba explained that each of the survey's topical benchmarks is a composite of several indicators of job satisfaction, with scores ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). For each benchmark, the report shows Amherst's score relative to all COACHE participants and five peers selected by Amherst. The peers chosen for the 2020 survey are Bates, Davidson, Hamilton, Kenyon, and Wellesley, he noted. The benchmark analysis is broken out for all faculty, pre-tenure faculty, associate professors, women, and faculty of color. J. Barba noted that the report identifies several areas of strength and concern in job satisfaction, relative to Amherst's peers and all COACHE participants. According to the survey results, Amherst's areas of strength are collaboration, facilities and resources, governance adaptability, a shared sense of purpose in governance, health and retirement benefits, satisfaction with senior leadership, and satisfaction with research. Areas of concern are departmental collegiality, departmental engagement, department leadership, service work, promotion to full professor, and the clarity of tenure expectations. J. Barba said that it is important to note that these areas do not necessarily represent an absolute high or low score, but rather an evaluation relative to other COACHE schools. As an example, the benchmark for departmental collegiality is a 4 (satisfied), but that still leaves Amherst in the bottom 30 percent of COACHE participants. He then answered the members' questions about a table that presented the trend in each survey benchmark over the three project years.

The committee expressed some concern about the survey's overall response rate of 49 percent, which represents a decline since the last survey, and which is a lower response rate than that of many peer schools. The response rate in 2017 was 56 percent, it was noted. J. Barba explained that the end of the survey project had overlapped with the beginning of the shift to remote education, due to COVID-19. He said that a response of 50 percent is fairly good, and that the results of this survey are largely consistent with survey results in 2013 and 2017. Losing a few critical weeks of survey time could have had an impact on the response rate, he noted. Professor Trapani pointed out that peer schools would have experienced the same truncated survey process, but still had higher response rates than Amherst's. In addition, the committee noted that Amherst's response rate has traditionally been low. Professor Kingston said he was surprised by Amherst's low response rates, and he wonders if a representative sample resulted.

Continuing the conversation, the members were a bit puzzled that the response rate for faculty of color was quite low, but that faculty in this category who did respond were generally positive, particularly in comparison to other participants in the COACHE survey. It was noted that the response rate for non-tenure-track faculty was also low, which was seen as a concern. Professor Kingston wondered if there was an error in an item at the bottom of page eleven of the report. Among line items tabulating the worst aspects of working at Amherst, one line is presented as capturing responses indicating that there are no positive aspects of work at Amherst, rather than no negative aspects, which might have been the intention. J. Barba said he would inquire. Responding to a question from Professor Trapani about some survey items, J. Barba clarified that some questions were provided only to those (e.g., tenure-track faculty) for whom they were relevant, rather than to all respondents. Professor Trapani also expressed the view that some aspects of the data visualization within the report made it challenging to make comparisons among groups across ranks for a given survey item, for example. J. Barba said that COACHE is responsible for the production of the report, which would be time-consuming to modify. Professor Trapani noted that it would be useful to consider how different groups compare to each other in their satisfaction levels for the individual items.

Turning to another issue that arises from the survey responses, Professor Umphrey noted a significant trend downward over the seven-year period between 2013 and 2020 in regard to collaboration among faculty. She wonders whether this trend is reflective of less involvement in interdisciplinary work among colleagues. Professor Umphrey also wonders whether the concerns surrounding departmental engagement and collaboration that are reflected in the survey responses signal a culture shift over the past seven years. She also is curious to learn more about the decline in satisfaction around teaching during that seven-year span, wondering if and how demands on faculty have increased or shifted. The committee wondered whether survey respondents may have different views than non-respondents. The committee thanked J. Barba, who left the meeting at 3:30 P.M.

Going forward, Provost Epstein said that she plans to consult with N. Jones and Pawan Dhingra and Allen Hart, faculty equity and inclusion officers, about how the college can learn more—and seek to address—the issues that some of the survey responses raise. In regard to following up on the survey results in other ways, she recommended that the committee work to develop language for the *Faculty Handbook* to clarify the criteria for tenure and promotion to full professor, a project that has been on the committee's agenda for several years. Any change in the language will require a vote of the faculty, she noted. In regard to promotion to full professor, Professor Kingston commented that negative views on this issue may be a natural result of the college's shift in practice away from the promotion review operating as a rubber stamp. Having a more substantive review at this career stage may account for associate professors' dissatisfaction with the process, but that does not mean that this change is not positive, in his view. Professor Kingston said that, overall, he feels that, while the COACHE survey can be a useful tool for studying trends, it should be subsidiary to more qualitative approaches. In his view, one of the most significant issues that should be addressed is the quality of childcare that is available to the faculty. This has been an area of concern for years, he noted. Provost Epstein said that it is her understanding that it is the quality of the Woodside facility, and not the care, that has been the most pressing issue. She informed the members that plans were under way to consider a new childcare facility at the time that the pandemic struck. Unfortunately, that project will need to be delayed as a result of COVID-19.

Concluding the conversation, Professor del Moral said that she was also surprised by the decline in the survey's response rate over the past seven years. She wonders whether communicating about the concrete changes (e.g., the development of the program to support and compensate department chairs) that have been outgrowths of concerns expressed by the faculty via previous surveys may be helpful. Showing that the college takes the survey results seriously, and acts on them when possible, could inspire more faculty to participate, perhaps. The provost said that she would speak with J. Barba about taking this approach when faculty are next invited to participate in the survey. Professor Trapani then suggested that the committee also consider ways to address respondents' concern about the appreciation and recognition of faculty. In this regard, Professor Leise expressed appreciation for the Center for Teaching and Learning and Academic Technology Services' practice of showcasing and recognizing on their website the pedagogical innovations of individual faculty. Professor Trapani noted the importance of considering meaningful ways to value and recognize faculty service and contributions to the college and their fields.

Conversation turned to expectations for committee service during the pandemic, an issue about which some chairs of faculty committees have sought clarification, the provost said. She noted that the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Structures during COVID-19 had recommended that committees meet only when they feel it is necessary to do so. The members agreed that, given the extra demands on the

faculty during the pandemic, committees should set several priorities, address pressing matters/projects only, and meet with less frequency and only when necessary. President Martin said that she supports this approach, while expressing the view that the college's work surrounding anti-racism cannot be delayed. The members concurred. After some additional conversation about the need to move forward on this front, it was recommended that the provost reach out the chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning to suggest that this body continue its efforts to learn more about student success at Amherst. Concluding the conversation about committee service, Provost Epstein noted that, in light of the committee's concerns about the number of faculty that might be asked to serve on the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on the Implementation of the Workday Student Module, she has revised the charge for that group. The provost proposed that the chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (or the chair's designee), a faculty member who is serving as a class dean, and four other faculty members (with at least one faculty member from the humanities, social sciences, and sciences) serve. Professor Kingston asked if there is already a committee that includes faculty that is serving in an advisory role for the Workday project. Provost Epstein responded that there is such a committee, which is focused on human resources and payroll functions. Professor Kingston suggested that the faculty on that committee be invited to continue their work by serving on the new committee, as these colleagues would already be familiar with the Workday project. Provost Epstein agreed to extend an invitation to these faculty members. Professor Trapani asked if service on the ad hoc committee would "count" as the members' committee service. Provost Epstein said that she believes that it would.

In the brief time remaining, the members discussed [a letter from Professors Hicks and Edwards](#), who wrote in their role as members of the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty. Professor Kingston, noting the valuable role that the consultative group had played in last year's effort to create a common evaluation form, expressed support for formalizing the structure and role of the consultative group, including its plans to elect its members. Other Committee of Six members said that they share this view. Professor Umphrey asked if the committee can be provided with some background about the consultative group. Associate Provost Tobin said that she would provide the members with relevant Committee of Six minutes, which include information about the consultative group's history. The committee agreed to invite the consultative group (past and current members) to meet with the Committee of Six to discuss the issues raised in the letter, most prominently the request to engage in consultation about the challenges posed by COVID-19, and future accommodations that might be offered to untenured faculty by the college. (Professors Edwards and Hicks later agreed to meet with the Committee of Six on August 31.)

Concluding the meeting, the members discussed [an August 12, 2020, note sent to the committee by Professor Fong](#), which had a number of signatories. The committee reviewed each of the measures proposed by them. In regard to the request for regular information about the number of students studying in different modalities, Professor Trapani commented that the college has been sending weekly communications to the community, and conveying information as it becomes known, including within the minutes of the Committee of Six and at meetings of the chairs of academic departments and programs. It was noted that shifts in the decisions of some faculty and students have made the situation fluid. As to the request that Amherst provide financial support for students who have made a change to remote learning, Provost Epstein said that the college has been generous with the support that it is providing to students affected by the pandemic. In regard to the request to begin planning for the spring semester, President Martin and Provost Epstein responded that it is too early to begin making such plans, as the course that the pandemic takes will be determinative in many ways. The signatories

also asked for clarity about whether faculty are expected to teach on campus, or are free to decide for themselves if they wish to teach in person or remotely, without repercussions. Professor Trapani said, that from his view, Amherst has made it clear that faculty can decide whether they will teach on campus or remotely during the pandemic, with the hope that as many faculty as possible will choose to teach on campus—if they are able. In regard to whether such a decision will have any impact on faculty personnel processes, Professor Trapani noted that the college has reiterated that the decision not to teach in person will not affect the outcome of such processes.

Noting the request to extend policies from spring 2020 surrounding teaching evaluations for tenure-track faculty and the extension of their tenure clocks, the committee stood by its earlier decision to return to the regular processes of having end-of-semester teaching evaluations and future retrospective letters solicited from all students in all classes taught by tenure-track faculty, and to have these evaluations and letters included in reappointment and tenure dossiers. The committee also continues to feel that it is premature to offer any additional extension of tenure clocks at this time. If the course of the pandemic results in dramatic changes, the members would be open to thinking further about these decisions, they said. As to the request to give tenure-track faculty the option of a course release that does not require a reduction in pay, the provost noted that the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Structures During COVID-19 decided not to take this approach. Rather, the approach has been for the provost and departments to work with individual faculty members to make a number of arrangements to reduce pressures surrounding teaching and to offer greater flexibility, particularly for pre-tenure colleagues, and for all faculty with significant care-giving responsibilities. In terms of the proposal to allow faculty to choose to take an additional course reduction in exchange for teaching an extra course in the future, or for supervising special topics or theses, the provost noted that “mortgaging” courses would be problematic, particularly because the college expects to have a greater number of students on campus next year, as about two hundred students are currently taking academic leaves or gap years.

In regard to [a second note sent by Professor Fong on August 14, 2020, on the topic of admissions during the pandemic](#), Provost Epstein informed the members that President Martin had responded to the suggestions therein, which are not considered viable.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty