

The first 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, August 30, 2021. Present, 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 welcoming new and returning members and reviewing some of the ways in which the committee will work. She noted issues of confidentiality and attribution in the committee's minutes, informing the members that the public minutes should be used as a guide in regard to questions of whether matters that are discussed can be shared with others. It was agreed that email will not be used to communicate about personnel or other confidential matters, and that the use of email to address Committee of Six deliberations should be kept to a minimum as a general matter. The provost noted that the committee's regular meeting times will be 2:30 P.M. on Mondays this fall.

Continuing with her remarks, Provost Epstein reviewed the long-standing policy of appending letters to the committee's minutes when the members have discussed the matters contained within them. Letter-writers are informed by the provost's office as to when their letters will be appended. If colleagues state at the outset that they do not want the contents of a letter discussed in the public minutes, the committee will decide whether it wishes to take up the matter in question. On a related note, Professor Umphrey suggested that the provost introduce the members of the Committee of Six at the next faculty meeting, in this way helping to ensure that new colleagues know to whom they should write if they have a question or concern. Provost Epstein agreed to do so.

Discussion turned to the schedule for faculty meetings this fall, and the members decided that the following dates should be held for possible faculty meetings: September 21, October 5, October 19, November 2, November 16, December 7, and December 21. The provost informed the committee that Associate Provost Janet Tobin will continue to serve as the recorder of the Committee of Six minutes, and that Nancy Ratner, director of academic projects, will continue to serve as the recorder of the faculty meeting minutes.

The members next discussed potential agenda items for the committee. Provost Epstein reviewed a list of topics and invited the members to propose additional items. It was agreed that major issues for discussion by the committee will include continuing the work of last year to clarify the criteria for tenure, aligning language with practice, and to facilitate a process to develop departmental expectations for tenure; clarifying some reappointment procedures; considering recommendations and proposals surrounding committee service and shared governance (including the related work of consultant Susan Pierce); and developing a charge to the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty. Professor Umphrey suggested that the committee also take up the idea of developing a new structure to carry out the work of the Committee of Six (e.g., creating two separate committees, one to focus on tenure, reappointment, and promotion, and another to serve as the executive committee of the faculty). In making this proposal—which has been brought forward on a number of occasions in the past, including by some Committee of Six members last year—she cited the increasing number of faculty personnel cases and the resultant challenges of having sufficient time to address other governance matters.

On a related note, Provost Epstein gave a short update on the work of S. Pierce. Pressing matters over the summer prevented a planned survey of the faculty from moving forward, the provost said; she informed the members that Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, will soon be helping to develop an instrument to gather feedback on questions that the consultant has raised, which were discussed with the Committee of Six last year.

Continuing with the list of topics that the committee will address, Professor Manion suggested that the members consider the tenure procedure governing the participation of Committee of Six members in tenure deliberations when a member of their department is standing for tenure (see below).

[Faculty Handbook III., E., 4., e.](#)

e. Committee of Six Responsibilities in Tenure Recommendations. The Committee of Six annually reviews its procedures for the consideration of tenure cases. It then reviews each tenure case individually, all members of the Committee reading the documents submitted in each case. Its role in tenure cases is to make recommendations to the president. When a candidate for tenure is from the same department as a member of the committee, that member shall, though remaining present, neither participate in the committee's discussion of, nor vote in the case. Abstentions or absentions because of conflict of interest or other conscientious reasons are always acceptable when the vote is taken (voted by the faculty, October 1986). (This procedure is also referenced in the committee's charge; see [Faculty Handbook, IV., S., 1., a.](#))

Professor Manion commented that she had raised concern about this procedure at the end of the last academic year, as had some other members, wondering about its rationale and questioning its value. It was agreed that the committee should consider this matter; any changes that might be recommended would require a vote of the faculty to implement, it was noted. Associate Provost Tobin informed the committee that, with the support of Mike Kelly, head of archives and special collections, and Pam Korenewsky, academic administration/policy specialist, she has been gathering background information surrounding this procedure to inform the members' discussion.

Conversation turned to the approach that will be taken to minuting the committee's meetings this year. The returning members noted that last year's committee had agreed that the minutes should be less detailed than in the past, favoring a greater focus on summarizing salient points made during discussions, and the rationale for and impact of decisions. The new members agreed that it would be useful to continue this approach. Conversation focused on whether there should continue to be some individual attribution in the minutes, as a matter of sound faculty governance and transparency, and to offer consistency in the presentation of individual members' lines of argument (including when members change their minds about an issue over time). The committee agreed that there should be a presumption of attribution when the committee discusses significant matters of policy, notably when the members are presenting a range of viewpoints on a subject, in particular when there is disagreement regarding these ideas. Rather than adopting rigid rules under which attribution would be required, however, the members agreed, as had last year's committee, to navigate questions surrounding the need for attribution flexibly, as discussions unfold. The committee then turned briefly to a personnel matter.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Umphrey asked the president and provost for an update on two building projects: the Aliko Perroti and Seth Frank Lyceum and the new student center and dining commons. President Martin and Provost Epstein explained that the lyceum, which will bring together the Center for Humanistic Inquiry, the history department, and some other humanities faculty and create a number of new public spaces for the community, is now well into the design development stage and should open in fall 2023. It was agreed that Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, should be asked to provide an update on the project to the college community this fall. Turning to the new student center and dining commons, President Martin said that the project has gone through a robust conceptual design phase, and that the design will continue to be refined during the schematic design stage, which is now under way. She explained that the student center architect, Herzog & de Meuron, is working with Sasaki, a planning, design, and engineering firm, on the schematic design, and will be consulting with students, as details are finalized. Students were also consulted at earlier stages of the project, the president commented. She said that she anticipates that the design for the student center and dining commons will be shared with the college community, as it takes shape. Professor Martini asked if plans call for the lyceum and student center to be net-zero buildings. President Martin explained that both buildings will become carbon neutral as part of the campus-wide climate action plan.

Continuing with questions, Professor Umphrey asked for an update on searches for the new chief equity and inclusion officer (CEIO), chief student affairs officer (CSAO), and chief financial officer (CFO). President Martin noted that Provost Epstein and Liz Agosto, dean of students and interim chief student affairs officer, are co-chairing the search for the CEIO. Provost Epstein said that there are a number of candidates that the search committee intends to interview, while commenting that many colleges and universities are engaged in searches for this position at this time; the competition for qualified candidates is significant. Nevertheless, the provost said that she is hopeful that the search will yield an excellent candidate. Turning to the CFO position, President Martin informed the members that Lisa Rutherford, general counsel and chief policy officer, will lead the search committee for this position. ([On September 1, the president sent a note to the community](#) about the search and the interim leadership structure that she has put in place for the finance division.) She also noted that the search firm of Isaacson Miller will assist with both the CEIO and the CFO searches. In regard to the position of CSAO, the president said that she has decided to think further about the leadership structure in the student affairs division, and to have an interim period in which Dean Agosto serves as dean of students and chief student affairs officer. President Martin said that she is considering whether to adopt a structure in which there is a dean of students, but not a CSAO, and to use the funding that had been allocated for the CSAO position to support positions at other levels in student affairs where there is the greatest need. On a related note, Professor Vaughan inquired about the status of the search for a chief human resources officer. The president noted that, after three candidates had come to campus for interviews, the college had made an offer to one of them. Unfortunately, that individual had to withdraw from consideration. The search is ongoing, and the pool of candidates is being expanded.

Discussion turned to the faculty meeting that had been held the previous evening, during which a number of faculty members had argued that the individual faculty should be given the flexibility to be able to teach remotely for a period of time, due to issues surrounding the pandemic. Some had also argued that remote teaching should be permitted at the college more broadly, beyond the COVID-19 era. At present, the policy is that all faculty must teach in person. The members, who emphasized that the Amherst faculty are in the best position to meet their students' educational needs, including during the pandemic, had a wide-ranging discussion about short-term remote teaching and other pedagogical approaches that faculty might take when faced with challenges caused by COVID-19. Informed by the committee's views that the faculty should be given additional flexibility in this matter, and the feedback that had been offered at the faculty meeting, Provost Epstein announced the following guidelines for the fall semester the next day: Faculty members who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate at home, or otherwise away from campus, for ten days, according to current Massachusetts regulations. During this period of isolation, faculty members who have tested positive for the virus may conduct their classes via Zoom or otherwise organize their teaching in ways they believe are best for their students. If faculty members believe they may have been exposed to COVID-19, they should be in touch with the Testing Center about receiving a same-day antigen test. If that is not possible, faculty members should proceed to class and be especially careful with masking and physical-distancing practices. As recommended by the committee, Provost Epstein agreed that faculty members who have a short-term need to teach remotely, but who have not tested positive for COVID-19, should first discuss possible departmental solutions with their chair. If a solution is found at the department level, the faculty member or the chair would be asked to share with the provost how the situation will be handled. In this way, she will be able to maintain a sense of practices across departments. If a departmental solution cannot be found, it was agreed that the faculty member or chair should contact the provost. She would then discuss the various options that are available for continued instruction in the class. These options may include having another professor teach the class, recorded lectures, or teaching virtually via Zoom.

In regard to approaches that faculty members might take to teaching their classes when a professor and/or students cannot attend class in person because of COVID-19, several committee members suggested that a colleague could set up a laptop in a classroom and turn Zoom on for the absent professor. In this way the colleague could teach the class remotely while the students are in the classroom together and/or a

student could attend the class remotely. Provost Epstein commented that, while this approach may be workable, staff in information technology (IT) have concerns that audio issues may emerge. She understands that, if IT is given enough lead time and is not overwhelmed, staff can provide some help, for example, providing the faculty members with microphones and offer advice.

Beyond the pandemic, the provost noted that any shift that would allow faculty members to change the mode of instruction at the college as a general matter will need to be decided through the college's shared governance processes, and an overall change would probably ultimately reach the level of the college's board of trustees. She agreed to initiate a conversation with the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) about how the college wishes to move forward with the modes of instruction that the faculty offer on a regular, ongoing basis. Following conversations with the CEP, she said that these matters will be brought to the Committee of Six and to the faculty more broadly. The members expressed support for this approach.

Turning to a different topic, President Martin asked the members for their views on the COVID-19 protocols that have been put in place for students, some of which the college hopes to relax after the first several weeks of the semester—depending on the course of the pandemic, including the number of positive COVID-19 cases that emerge on campus. She noted that many students view the protocols as too restrictive, and she wonders whether professors may agree, and whether individual faculty might favor having a system in which they would be able to decide on the COVID-19 protocols to put in place in their own classrooms. An example might be requirements surrounding double-masking. Recognizing the complexities involved, including the need for regular communication about the quickly changing landscape surrounding these matters, the members felt that it is probably best to continue to have college-wide protocols that can allow for exceptions, as needed, rather than leaving decisions up to individuals. On a related note, Professor Manion asked if the college will be sharing information about the COVID-19 vaccination rates within the community. Provost Epstein said that she believes that an announcement will be made very soon, after the compilation of some final numbers. (On September 1, it was announced that 99 percent of students and 97 percent of faculty and staff have been vaccinated.) The members then reviewed a proposal for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Stipend competition and selected two nominees.

Discussion turned to [the Housing Committee Proposal to Revise the college's Home Purchase Program](#). Provost Epstein commented that the proposal, which the Housing Committee developed over the past three years, had been shared with last year's Committee of Six, for informational purposes, as is also the case this year; overall, last year's committee had expressed support for taking the steps outlined (see the committee's minutes of June 7, 2021). The Housing Committee also provided the proposal to the faculty as a whole as one of the committee reports shared for the June 8, 2021, faculty meeting, the provost noted. At present, outside legal counsel is reviewing aspects of the proposal to ensure that they meet legal requirements, Provost Epstein informed the committee. As part of this review, it has been determined that the houses cannot be offered for sale to Five-College faculty other than Amherst faculty, a change to current policy that is part of the proposal. Other refinements may be necessary, she said. Over the summer, [Professor Sims wrote two notes to the committee](#), expressing concerns about the Housing Committee's proposal. These concerns revolve chiefly around the proposal's provision that would allow those who currently own college houses to stay in them for life, rather than being required to sell them back to the college within two years of retiring (the current policy), and the governance process for adopting the proposal—in particular, that the faculty as a whole has not been given the opportunity to have a discussion or to vote on a recommendation to the board of trustees.

Professor Martini said that she shares Professor Sims's concerns, commenting that the proposed change regarding ownership of houses for a lifetime provides the greatest benefits to a segment of the community—tenured members of the faculty—who have the greatest resources. She suggested taking an incremental approach to implementing the proposal—for example, limiting initial steps to offering houses for purchase to include tenure-track faculty. While there is a provision in the proposal that the changes to

the program be evaluated after a decade, Professor Martini stressed that grandfathering those already in the program would mean that many houses would be unavailable to faculty and staff early in their Amherst careers, potentially for decades. Professors Martini and Schroeder Rodríguez emphasized the desirability of thinking more creatively about ways to provide housing to tenure-track faculty and others, including renovating larger houses to create spaces for multiple individuals and families that could be rented to members of the college community. Another option might be for the college to build a new “green” housing facility with some communal spaces, an approach that could serve more faculty and create a more equitable program, and which would be consistent with the priorities of Amherst’s climate action plan.

Agreeing with the views expressed by Professor Martini, Professor Manion commented that, if implemented, the proposed changes would lock down college housing to the point that it would be difficult for newer members of the community to have access to this benefit. Changes that would bring the greatest good would be those that allow more new faculty to live near campus, enabling them to be more engaged in campus life. As she had noted last year, Professor Manion expressed concern that the proposal is predicated on the understanding that faculty are not interested in buying college houses, which she knows not to be the case. She is aware of a number of colleagues who want to live close to campus and would welcome the opportunity to buy a college house, but have not been kept informed about the ones that are available for purchase. Provost Epstein explained that Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, has reported that, due to the poor condition of the homes that had been available for sale, the home purchase program had been suspended three years ago until a proposal to improve the program was developed. It is for this reason that faculty no longer receive communications about college houses that are for sale. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez said that he had looked at an available college house a year after arriving at the college and had found it to be so run down that it would have been too costly and time-consuming to make a purchase viable. He was disappointed not to be able to live closer to campus and noted that the housing market is so competitive that buying a house near the college has become out of reach for many faculty members. At the conclusion of the conversation, the committee agreed that it would be useful to meet with the Housing Committee to learn more about the thinking underlying the proposal. The provost agreed to invite the members of the Housing Committee to do so.

Turning to another topic, Provost Epstein noted, for the benefit of the new members, that last year’s committee had developed a revision to the first paragraph of Amherst’s current *Faculty Handbook* language about the criteria for tenure ([Faculty Handbook, III., E., 3.](#)), with the goal of enhancing clarity and achieving greater alignment with practice. It had been agreed that this year’s Committee of Six would consider the proposal and share it with the faculty widely—perhaps, with suggestions provided by the new members. In addition, the provost said that last year’s committee had recommended that the college adopt a system that combines the articulation of a broad set of college-wide criteria for tenure—with that language continuing to be part of the *Faculty Handbook*—and complementary departmental expectations for tenure. The articulation of these expectations would be informed by departments’ knowledge of the expectations and standards of their fields.

The provost informed the members that she would like to move forward this semester with asking chairs to begin working with their departmental colleagues to develop departmental/discipline-specific standards for tenure—focusing on scholarship and creative work, teaching, and service. Once completed, these documents could be provided to tenure-track faculty and prospective faculty, and—at the time of tenure—to external reviewers and the Committee of Six. Last year’s committee had noted that, in regard to the Committee of Six, specifically, having more information about the expectations of departments and fields will be another helpful way of putting departmental recommendations and the evaluations of outside reviewers in context, and of ensuring consistency in the evaluation process over time and across different Committees of Six. Provost Epstein emphasized that it will be important to make it clear that, while any departmental expectations surrounding tenure will provide helpful information to all involved in faculty personnel processes, it is the institutional standards for tenure that will remain paramount. The committee

had agreed that communication between departments and the Committee of Six would be important, in order to align expectations between the two groups, and that, to ensure consistency with college-wide criteria, departmental tenure standards should be reviewed and approved by the Committee of Six prior to being posted. All had agreed that the emphasis of all of the work that will be undertaken surrounding clarifying tenure expectations and criteria will focus on codifying current standards and policy, rather than developing new policies and expectations.

The committee discussed the desirability of providing a template to departments to follow when developing departmental tenure expectations. A number of examples of such documents had been provided to the committee in advance of the meeting and could serve as models for the development of a template, it was agreed. It was agreed that the provost's office should draft a template for the committee's review.

Concluding the meeting, the members briefly discussed the need to consider the purpose and goals of the reappointment process, as well as procedural issues. The provost said this topic will be on the committee's agenda this fall.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty