

The sixth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2020–2021 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 3:05 P.M. on Monday, August 31, 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 President Martin providing an update on COVID-19 testing that has taken place since the beginning of the fall semester. So far, out of about eight thousand tests, two students and one custodian have tested positive for the virus, she said. It is thought that the test result for the custodian, who remains asymptomatic, may have been a false positive. The president informed the members that many parents have written to say how grateful they are that Amherst decided to bring some students back to campus, and how pleased their children are to be here. She thanked the faculty and staff for the work they are doing on students' behalf.

Continuing, Provost Epstein echoed the president's thanks and noted the importance for students of having the opportunity to be on campus. At the same time, enforcement of rules surrounding student behavior has emerged as a significant need, and the senior staff has been considering a number of different approaches, she said. Among them are putting posters up across the campus with reminders of the rules surrounding social distancing and wearing masks, and the importance of not putting the community at risk by violating these measures. Some coaches are assisting student affairs professionals by being on campus on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings to support students and remind them of safety measures. Professor Kingston asked if Amherst students who are living off campus nearby (and studying remotely) will be permitted to have COVID-19 tests. President Martin said that the college is eager for these students, who number about forty, to be tested. They have been invited to have testing that will take place at a time that is separate from that of other members of the college community. President Martin noted that it is difficult for the college to know exactly how many enrolled students are living nearby; approximately thirty have permission from student affairs to live off campus for various reasons, and their addresses are known. Other students in the area have responded to requests for information, but not yet all.

The members turned to several committee assignments. On the subject of committee service more generally, the provost noted that some colleagues seem to be unfamiliar with the process that is used to appoint faculty to committees, including the Committee of Six's central role. She plans to find ways to make the process more transparent, including through a discussion of college governance with faculty who are in the early stages of their careers at Amherst. On a related note, Provost Epstein informed the members that she was pleased to learn from Professor O'Hara, chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning, that the ad hoc committee will be meeting biweekly this semester.

The committee next considered proposals for the Mellon New Directions grant and selected the college's nominee. Following the conclusion of that process, Professor Trapani thanked Professor Manion for her work as the organizer and facilitator of *The History of Anti-Black Racism in America* lecture series and seminar. He praised the first talk by Professor Mary Frances Berry, which took place on August 26, and said that he is looking forward to future lectures in the series.

In anticipation of the imminent arrival of the members of the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty, the committee briefly discussed the history and purpose of the group. Professor Umphrey said that past Committee of Six minutes about the consultative group, which had been provided to the members, had been very helpful in learning more about the context for the upcoming conversation. When asked by the committee to offer her thoughts about the group, Provost Epstein expressed support for having such a body, while noting that it is important that it not serve solely as a vehicle for advocacy. As such, it could contribute to an *us versus them* culture at the college that would be divisive. In her view, the group's purpose should be to support tenure-track faculty and serve as a conduit for communication with the administration, but also to support the institution.

Professors Edwards and Hicks, who are currently the only members of the consultative group, joined the meeting at 3:30 P.M. The discussion that ensued focused on ways of formalizing the charge of the

group, including better defining its structure; the process for selecting its members; and the work that it undertakes.

Professors Edwards and Hicks thanked the committee for inviting them to meet. Professor Hicks began the conversation by asking if tenure-track faculty had been consulted before the Committee of Six made the recent decision to return to the regular system of soliciting student end-of-semester evaluations and retrospective letters for all classes taught by tenure-track faculty. (Last year's committee decided that there would be an opt-in system for end-of-semester evaluations and retrospective letters in the spring of 2020, due to the impact of the pandemic.) Professor Kingston responded that, while the Committee of Six is always open to hearing colleagues' views, the committee is elected to make decisions and does not necessarily consult with affected groups before doing so. In this case, if the situation with the pandemic changes dramatically, the committee could always revisit this decision, he noted. Commenting further, Professor Kingston said he expects that evaluations of teaching from this highly unusual time will be read in context. Professor Hicks commented on the broader, ongoing conversation within the academy about the disparate impact of the pandemic and how to remedy it—in regard to, for example, race, gender, and migration status. Professor Umphrey said that it would be helpful if Professor Hicks could be more specific about the ways she envisions that the college can think equitably about processes moving forward. She herself would worry about creating inequity by *not* following the regular processes of the college, which apply to all. Among these processes are the requirements surrounding student evaluation of teaching.

Continuing the conversation, Professors Edwards and Hicks conveyed tenure-track faculty members' concerns and anxiety about the impact that COVID-19 is having on research, teaching, and service—and asked how the college will ensure that the effect of the pandemic will be taken into account at the time of reappointment and tenure. Professor Edwards expressed the view that there are disparities faced by tenure-track faculty that are specific to their disciplines and/or departments. He warned against a one-size-fits-all approach to evaluating and documenting the impact of the pandemic on tenure-track faculty members' research and teaching, particularly for women and other members of underrepresented groups. Having pre-tenure faculty from different disciplines engage in a conversation about the effects of the pandemic would be helpful, Professors Edwards and Hicks concurred. Learning more about what different colleagues are facing would inform the work of the consultative group, and college decision-making. President Martin suggested that departments, including the chair and other tenured faculty, should be made aware of the distinctions under discussion, and she stressed the importance of departments' role in keeping a record of the obstacles being faced by tenure-track faculty—and the resultant impact. Certainly, this topic should be part of the annual conversation process, Provost Epstein noted. The committee agreed that departments and tenure-track faculty will play a key role in regard to documentation, and that the Committee of Six will review candidates' records in context when making recommendations to the president to inform faculty personnel processes.

Discussion turned to creating a charge for the consultative group, which would include the way in which the consultative group's membership is chosen. Professors Edwards and Hicks stressed their desire to learn more about the priorities and needs of tenure-track faculty and said that it would be helpful to be able to send their colleagues surveys, with this goal, among others, in mind. Having this information will contribute to any charge that is drafted for the consultative group, they noted. Provost Epstein said that plans are under way to survey the faculty in October about their early experience in the fall. She suggested that, as was done last May when a survey was sent to the faculty, the consultative group frame some questions for tenure-track faculty. Professor Hicks noted that she and Professor Edwards had not received the results of the May survey. Provost Epstein said that she would check in with Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, about this oversight. She feels that the consultative group should not be sending out surveys to the faculty directly, as all surveys need to be coordinated through the Office of Institutional Research, and all results must be available to the institution, rather than to a subgroup only. Professor Hicks stressed the need to gather data

systematically, in order to learn more about the issues of concern to tenure-track faculty. Provost Epstein said that her office would be happy to support such efforts, with the help of J. Barba.

The question of how members of the consultative group are chosen was the next topic of conversation. In regard to the idea of having an election, Professor Umphrey noted some potential complexities. Would being included on the ballot be optional, for example? Would service, if elected, be mandatory for tenure-track faculty? She suggested putting off the idea of an election and the idea of constituting the group as a standing committee (which would require a vote of the faculty) for now, as a focus on procedure at the expense of articulating the group's immediate concerns could prove to be a distraction. Distilling what the substantive issues are for tenure-track faculty, and what they see as the work that the consultative group should undertake, seems most important at this juncture, in Professor Umphrey's view. The other members concurred. Formalizing structures for the group should also be a top priority.

The committee next asked why there are only two members of the consultative group at this time. Professors Edwards and Hicks said that there have been four members in the past, but that two members of last year's group have rotated off. Professor Edwards noted that the process for selecting new members has been informal, and has relied on internal recommendations from current members. Some tenure-track faculty have expressed concern about this process and have shared that they do not feel that they are being represented by the members of the group. Without being able to gather information, it is challenging to know what views to represent, Professor Edwards commented.

Continuing the conversation, President Martin expressed some concern that, constituting the consultative group as a standing committee could cement the idea that tenure-track faculty should not serve on major faculty committees. It might be felt that tenure-track faculty should be relegated to their own committee, if one exists. As it is, President Martin said that she has been surprised that tenure-track faculty tend to be "protected" from such service for the most part. The president expressed the view that having tenure-track faculty engaged in service that presents opportunities for leadership is good for tenure-track faculty, and good for Amherst. Professor Trapani said that he served on a number of major committees prior to being tenured and often felt like an outlier. He shares President Martin's view that it is important to have the perspectives of tenure-track faculty represented on college committees; it is his hope the ethos surrounding such service at Amherst will change, including its value toward tenure.

Responding, Provost Epstein noted that, in her experience, the Committee of Six has been responsible for the absence of tenure-track colleagues on major committees, as members often discourage inviting pre-tenure members of their own departments to serve in the interest of protection. In her view, this approach works against the idea that committee service is for everyone. Professor Trapani asked whether committee service is currently valued at the time of tenure. Provost Epstein said that the value must be weighed against the time that service on a committee requires. Professor Hicks expressed the view that serving on a standing committee for tenure-track faculty should not preclude serving on other committees, in her view. She can imagine that serving on the consultative group, should it become a standing committee, would not be a weekly commitment. At the same time, Professor Hicks expressed the view that there has been a spike in the service burden among faculty of color during the pandemic that should be recognized.

Professor Hicks, returning to the issue of how the consultative group should gather information about tenure-track faculty members' views, noted that this has been done in the past through informal listening sessions that have been held in person in the early morning. Professor Kingston asked if holding a listening session for all tenure-track faculty via Zoom could be workable, now that it is not possible to gather tenure-track faculty for an in-person meeting. Such a session would provide a venue for authoring a set of survey questions that could be included in the October survey, he suggested. More generally, Professor Trapani asked what the mechanism might be for consultation when decisions involve tenure-track faculty. The Committee of Six should consider this question, in his view. The members thanked Professors Hicks and Edwards for meeting and said that they look forward to working

with them on the envisioned charge for the consultative group, and in other ways that they may find helpful. Professors Edwards and Hicks said that they would begin work on the charge and will look forward to sharing a draft with the members. They left the meeting at 4:30 P.M.

In the time remaining, the members reflected on the conversation with Professors Edwards and Hicks. Professor Kingston emphasized the need to help these colleagues create more structure for the consultative group, and find a better approach for selecting the group's membership. The approach used now, which involves having current members float some names by one another, seems unlikely to ensure a breadth of perspectives. In his view, the consultative group could be a venue for cultivating leadership opportunities for tenure-track faculty, and it is his hope that the group will become a recognized and visible body. Professor Leise stressed the importance of helping the group become representative. To this end, she would avoid the approach of holding elections in favor of a method that would allow for carefully constituting a committee; having representatives who would bring a range of experience and perspectives to their work is critical, in her view. The other members agreed, and Professor del Moral suggested that, to this end, it would be a good idea for the membership to include representatives from the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. All agreed that more thought and clarity is needed if the group is to become a robust, constructive, and collaborative body. The committee also expressed concern that only two colleagues are leading the group at this time, and the burden that it is placing on them.

The meeting concluded with a brief related conversation about the need to address issues surrounding departmental cultures at the college. The members noted that this is an area that includes—and also extends beyond—the concerns of tenure-track faculty. Professor Umphrey said that she senses that departments may not currently be the cement that glues colleagues together, even as the college does not seem to be fostering interdisciplinary collaboration as much as has been the case in the past. There are interesting questions to raise and explore that go beyond the detailing of policy, she noted. Provost Epstein expressed the view that clarifying policies and procedures across departments could be a good place to start when it comes to addressing complaints about departmental cultures. She noted that many tenure-track colleagues' concerns about equity may stem from the fact that, at Amherst, departments have different policies and expectations. Given the decentralized structure of the college and the autonomy of departments, President Martin wonders about the degree to which departmental culture contributes to retention challenges. She suggested that it might be useful to do a faculty climate survey to learn more.

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty