

The fourteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2021–2022 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 1:00 P.M. on Wednesday, December 15, 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 informing the members that, given the rising number of COVID-19 cases at the college, in the local area, around the country, and around the world, Amherst plans to move to remote teaching and learning, including students conducting research for honors work, for the first two days of the January term. This will enable returning students to have additional testing upon arrival, while limiting in-person interactions. All students approved to return to campus during January term, regardless of whether or not they have registered for a course, must receive two negative PCR tests before they can participate in any in-person activities, including attending classes. For students returning to campus for in-person January-term classes, this means they must have a negative result from a PCR test taken on Sunday, January 2, and Tuesday, January 4, before they can attend class in-person or participate in any other in-person activities. An announcement of this change will be sent to the community soon, the provost noted. Professor Martini asked if the college is considering sending antigen-testing kits to students at home, so that they can test before they arrive on campus. President Martin said that, when she has inquired about this in the past, and that the Health Readiness Group has said that the college does not have self-administered antigen tests. The president said that she would ask again about the possibility of making use of such tests, under these circumstances. Of course, PCR testing at the testing center would also be required.

The committee asked if the college is considering other steps for January and, possibly, the spring semester, that might become necessary if there is considerable spread, potentially due to the Omicron variant. President Martin said that it is safe to assume that the Omicron variant will be present on campus. She noted that, while cases of this variant appear to be milder than previous ones, scientists are still learning more about Omicron, and much is uncertain. Even if cases are milder, the college would not have the resources in place to offer sufficient support to students who would need to be in isolation, if there were a major outbreak at Amherst. Professor Martini noted the worrisome indicator that hospitalizations are rising in the community and, along with others, emphasized the need for the college to make plans for more serious measures, in case such steps are needed. President Martin said that the college will not hesitate to take such measures again, should doing so become necessary. She informed the members that the situation is being monitored very closely, and it will be necessary to wait and see how things unfold. Professor Clotfelter asked if, as of now, students will still be allowed to study abroad next semester. Provost Epstein said that the college has trust in the programs in which students are set to participate and believes that these entities will make informed decisions with students' best interest in mind.

Conversation turned to the proposal for the academic calendar for the next academic year. Provost Epstein informed the members that the University of Massachusetts faculty senate has voted to start the next academic year at UMass on the Tuesday after Labor Day (September 6), which was unexpected. In order not to be out of sync with the start dates of the other institutions in the Five-College Consortium, Amherst will not be able to start its own academic year on August 31, as the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) and the Committee of Six recommended earlier. The CEP has now developed [an alternative calendar](#), the details of which its members described in [a letter to the Committee of Six](#). The CEP also provided [a second alternative calendar](#), which its members did not prefer, for consideration. It would require classes to begin on Labor Day, September 5. Under the committee's preferred proposal, the fall semester would begin on Thursday, September 1, 2022, and end on Sunday, December 19, 2022. Twelve of the weeks would have a full Monday-through-Friday schedule. Classes would be held on Labor Day, and the three days immediately following the Monday-through-Tuesday October break would be scheduled as Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday classes. There would be a four-day reading period and a five-day exam period, which the CEP feels is very important, as previous experimentation with a shorter exam period resulted in significant challenges. Other details about the rationale for the proposal are included in the CEP's letter. The members thanked the CEP for its excellent

work on the calendar and expressed appreciation to its members for considering issues surrounding the calendar with such great care.

The members wondered if the CEP's proposal would allow for a January term, should it be decided to have one in the next academic year. Provost Epstein said that it would be possible to mount a January term, as there are four weeks available in the proposal, while noting that there are a number of administrative and other barriers to doing so—among them budgetary concerns. Professor Umphrey asked if it would be possible to have a break after January term and before the spring semester if a January term were to be mounted, noting the fatigue level of students and faculty at the conclusion of such an intensive educational endeavor. Provost Epstein said that, without having January courses run later into the day so that they take place for a greater amount of time over a more abbreviated period, it would only be possible to have a weekend between the end of January term and the start of the spring semester. She noted that the spring semester might be somewhat less pressured for faculty and students who have participated in a January term, if faculty are teaching one course and students are taking three courses instead of a normal load. The CEP did not think it wise to extend the spring semester into summer to create such a break, which would affect the timing of commencement, for example. Professor Umphrey wondered if it might prove challenging to recruit faculty to teach during January without a longer break.

Professor Umphrey next expressed concern about having classes on Labor Day, stressing the impact that doing so would likely have on staff morale, since staff would need to be on campus—for example, some staff in information technology—to support faculty if classes were held. Professor Manion commented that issues surrounding the calendar seem to arise each time it is considered, and she wondered if there are core guiding principles that have been helpful in the past when considering the calendar that could continue to inform calendar discussions now and in the future. Provost Epstein said that such principles are in place, but that challenges occur regularly when Labor Day is late; it is difficult to create a calendar that both meets a set of academic requirements, and enables exams to conclude early enough in December that students are able to leave campus in time to arrive at their destinations before the holidays. Professor Martini, also expressing a preference for preserving Labor Day as a holiday, suggested that the college start the fall semester on August 31 and then not have classes on Labor Day. The members discussed the impact of this proposal on the number of class meetings a class would have if it falls on a Monday. Provost Epstein said that adopting a Monday class schedule on another day of the week would be necessary so that all classes meet for thirteen weeks. This would be possible, she noted. The committee agreed to consider this matter further at its meeting the next day, making a final decision on a proposal so that it could be brought to the faculty—hopefully, during the week of December 20.

Consultant Susan Pierce joined the meeting at 2:15 P.M. to facilitate what she calls the Zero-Based Committee exercise. She asked the committee to consider the following questions:

What does the faculty need to do to engage effectively in faculty governance?

What committees does the college need to enable the faculty to fulfill its primary albeit recommending responsibilities for academic matters?

What committees or processes does the college need to ensure that appropriate faculty are consulted about decisions that affect academic matters?

In what areas should the faculty serve in an advisory role to administrators who have primary responsibility for those areas?

Should the Committee of Six be split? If so, what should the process and timing be?

In a wide-ranging conversation, in the context of the committee structure and broader questions of governance at the college, the members discussed matters related to the areas of jurisdiction of the faculty, which center on the academic mission; areas in which staff have greater expertise and which the faculty should have a formal or informal advisory role; and areas in which the faculty should not have an advisory role, but should be informed. The members concurred that of central importance is gaining greater clarity about the realms in which the faculty has decision-making authority, and those in which it does not. Admission and financial aid is a good example, it was noted. While faculty play a role in setting policy, professors do not have the necessary expertise to make admissions decisions. Admissions staff, who have the background and expertise needed for this work, are charged with doing so. S. Pierce commented that she has learned that Amherst has a tradition of faculty involvement in operational areas of the college that is somewhat unusual in comparison to its peers. She noted that the current committee structure has evolved in this context, and, in her view, has led to an overabundance of committees and a sense among some faculty that service is a burden and that their time is not being used effectively.

S. Pierce encouraged the members to consider changes that could lead to more impactful, satisfying, and efficient uses of faculty time. She noted, for example, that she agreed with a point raised previously that faculty do not necessarily need to spend their time in regular committee meetings, in order to be consulted and/or informed about areas such as the admission, college budgetary matters, the library, or IT. Professor Clotfelter said that it is important to distinguish, from a faculty point of view, between being informed by being presented with information under the guise of being consulted, actually being consulted, and having the power to make a decision. He asked S. Pierce if she could provide an example of a matter of institutional importance that is not strictly within the faculty's purview, for which the faculty would have a formal consulting role. She offered the example of strategic planning. In regard to an informal advisory role, she suggested the scenario of the president asking for some faculty members' input about the hiring of a candidate for a senior-staff position.

Discussion turned to the definitions of faculty governance and shared governance, including distinctions between them and the critical role that the faculty plays in both realms. S. Pierce shared her understanding of the terms, which is informed by the definitions of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). *Faculty governance* pertains to how the faculty conducts its own business, e.g., through faculty committees and faculty meetings, S. Pierce noted. *Shared governance* pertains to the relationship of the board of trustees, the president, and the faculty, she said. Specifically, boards of trustees legally have fiduciary responsibility for the governance and welfare of the college or university they serve. They delegate operational responsibilities to the president, who in turn delegates administrative operations to senior staff and primary, albeit recommending, responsibility for academic matters such as the curriculum, academic standards, faculty hiring, and recommendations for tenure and promotion to the faculty. In healthy institutions, boards and presidents generally give deference to the collective wisdom of the faculty when it comes to academic matters, S. Pierce commented. Continuing, she noted that, in keeping with this practice of delegating academic matters to the faculty, many boards and presidents have over the years subscribed, sometimes formally and sometimes informally, to the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities (1966)*, which was jointly formulated by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). The 1966 statement calls for presidents and boards to approve faculty recommendations unless the institution's resources (human and financial) will not support what is being recommended, when the recommendation runs counter to the institution's mission, or when timing is a problem. In such instances, the AAUP asks that the president or board explain to the faculty the basis for their decision. The AAUP also argues that tenured faculty can only be let go for cause or in the event of financial exigency.

The committee found this information to be quite useful. The members stressed that, for faculty governance to function effectively, it is essential that colleagues trust and respect one another. It was agreed that a culture in which committees spend a great deal of time thinking through important matters deliberatively and thoroughly—only to have recommendations attacked and/or dismissed by the full faculty—can be frustrating

and demoralizing. The members suggested that offering faculty more time to reflect on the work of committees before proposals come to the faculty floor could help break this pattern, and they concurred that placing greater confidence in colleagues' work and having more respect for their efforts is essential. Finding ways to foster informal, iterative interactions among colleagues about committees' recommendations—prior to more formal consideration at faculty meetings—could also have a positive impact, it was noted.

Much of the remainder of the conversation involved brainstorming about ways to streamline the committee structure—with the points raised earlier in the meeting informing the members' initial thoughts. In regard to splitting the Committee of Six, the committee reiterated its support for constituting two separate committees—one that would serve as an executive committee of the faculty, and the other that would focus on reappointment, tenure, and promotion. (The minutes of [the committee's meeting of December 9, 2021](#) include a discussion of the members' views on this matter.) The committee agreed to bring a proposal to the faculty this spring to establish a separate tenure and promotion committee. If approved, that committee could begin work in the summer of 2022, it was noted. Its charge would be clear. In regard to the executive committee, which some felt should be called the governance committee, the members continued to believe that the body should function as the Committee of Six does now, with the exception of carrying out work surrounding faculty personnel processes. The central focus of this body's efforts in the next academic year, it was agreed, should be to bring forward a proposal for a charge for itself. The members continued to support the idea of these proposals being conceived as three-year pilots. Having the members of this year's Committee of Six who are eligible to continue their service next year join either the executive/governance committee or the tenure and promotion committee would be desirable for the sake of continuity, it was noted. All agreed that considering the process for selecting the tenure and promotion committee and its make-up will be important matters for this year's Committee of Six to consider and bring to the faculty.

To facilitate this work, the members concurred that S. Pierce should create a draft committee structure as a starting point for the Committee of Six's deliberations. S. Pierce agreed to do so and said that she would bring to this work a focus on committees that would advocate for the resources that faculty need, in order to continue to engage in research of the highest quality and excellence in teaching, advising, and mentoring students. President Martin expressed support for this approach, commenting on the need for faculty focus to be on important matters that are at the core of the academic mission, including those that touch on the most important issues facing higher education today—for example, creating equity across an increasingly diverse faculty and protecting academic freedom. She noted the threat posed by concentrating faculty time on potentially unnecessary and laborious processes that impinge on such work. A broad conversation followed about the ways in which some structural barriers, and a tendency toward incremental approaches, can limit the college's ability to effect significant change at Amherst—including in response to emerging issues. Most members concurred that a comprehensive review of the *Faculty Handbook*, with the goal of rethinking processes and procedures that can constrain flexibility and slow progress, could lead to important changes for the better in the realm of faculty and shared governance at the college.

Concluding the session with S. Pierce, the committee stressed the importance of bringing a positive framework to the work ahead—celebrating what works well, as well as engaging in critiques, and striving to bring constituencies together.

The members thanked S. Pierce and she left the meeting at 4:00 P.M. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 4:12 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty