

The twenty-second meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2020–2021 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 12:30 P.M. on Wednesday, December 16, 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 informing the members that the COVID-19 student advisory group with which she has been working has asked to meet with the Committee of Six to discuss academic workload issues. In addition, students would like the college to consider the possibility of allowing courses to be taken abroad over the summer for credit, since many students have missed opportunities to study away as a result of the pandemic. Provost Epstein commented that, under Amherst's policies, courses can only be taken over the summer for credit to make up deficiencies. There are a number of complexities associated with the students' proposal, she said, including constraints surrounding financial aid. The members agreed that President Martin would inform the students that the committee would not be meeting again until the very end of January, at which point the members could decide whether to meet with the students. It was noted that many students are finding it difficult to study from home, and that some face additional challenges because they must work and/or have significant family obligations. The members said that they have observed some of these dynamics among their students, many of whom are struggling, and have tried to be as flexible as possible. At the same time, all agreed that "watering down" courses is not an educational approach that is in students' best interests.

Conversation turned to [an email to the committee from Professor George](#), in which he had expressed concerns about some of what had transpired at the December 15 faculty meeting and at some other faculty meetings that had taken place earlier in the semester. In his communication, Professor George noted that, at the faculty meeting the previous evening, some questions had been called when some faculty still had their hands up, indicating that they wished to speak. In addition, no one had had an opportunity to speak to one of the motions before the question had been called, he noted. In his view, while procedures had not been violated, college custom had been, and he fears that damage is being done to collegial culture at the college. The members discussed Professor George's letter, and most members did not fully agree with his characterization of what had taken place at the most recent faculty meeting.

Professor Umphrey stressed the importance of having full debates and minutes taken to record them at faculty meetings. She expressed some concern about the trend toward having many committee-of-the-whole conversations, the notes of which are not shared (but which may be requested by members of the faculty), ahead of minuted discussions. Having a record of the discourse surrounding decision-making is essential from a faculty governance perspective, in Professor Umphrey's view. Professor Manion suggested that the committee communicate to the faculty that the Committee of Six welcomes their thoughts, questions, and correspondence, commenting that a very small number of faculty currently take advantage of this channel of communication, and that many tenure-track faculty or more recently tenured might not even know they can communicate directly with the committee as a group. The other members agreed that expanding the number of voices that weigh in on important issues will strengthen engagement in faculty governance.

Turning to another topic, Professor Kingston said that he welcomes the two-week gap between the January term and the spring semester that has been created as a result of approving a revised calendar, specifically shifting to a February 15 start date for the spring term. He asked the provost if there is room for flexibility in regard to the parameters of January term as a result. Provost Epstein said that, while all students must be done with their courses by the end of January term, and that no formal changes can be made (e.g., changing the timing of the exam period or when grades are due), professors may have opportunities to incorporate some flexibility into their January term courses, within these constraints.

Professor Trapani next commented on how much he appreciates receiving the comprehensive, useful

information contained in the Clery report, which is emailed to the Amherst community each year. (The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act Report, which is required by law, contains information about campus security policy and certain campus crime statistics. In addition, the report includes information about fire safety, fire detection/suppression systems, and statistics of damage, injury, and death caused by fire.) Professor Trapani suggested that it would be desirable to find more prominent ways to communicate about the report—beyond the community email—as the email can easily be overlooked. He feels that many members of the community would be interested in reading the report if they were more aware of its contents. ([The report is posted online.](#))

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.
The meeting adjourned at 2:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty