

The fifteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2021–2022 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 10:00 A.M. on Thursday, December 16, 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 the president informing the members that some peer schools, taking into account predictions that the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus may become prevalent by January, will be moving to remote teaching and learning during January. She noted the current troubling upward trend of COVID-19 cases on campus, in the state, nationally, and internationally. Depending on what happens with the virus, the Health Readiness Group and Senior Staff may need to consider doing the same, or taking other steps to de-densify the campus during January. As she had noted earlier, the college does not have sufficient staffing in Health Services or Student Affairs, or the isolation capacity, to meet the needs of the three hundred to five hundred students who will be on campus during January, should there be a major outbreak—such as that experienced by Cornell recently. The president informed the members that some staff in Student Affairs have been working without a break for two years and will be taking some well-deserved time off in January, another factor that needs to be taken into account. On the other hand, even if all staff were working, there would still not be sufficient resources available. Professor Manion asked why plans call for so many students to be on campus in January. Provost Epstein explained that around 160 students are set to take in-person classes, and others will be doing thesis work in labs and studios, for example. In addition, some international students will not be able to travel, due to various travel restrictions associated with COVID-19; other students have no other place to go during January. In addition, some winter athletes will also be on campus. Some members wondered whether it is wise to continue with athletics during this time. President Martin said that this issue will be considered, along with many others, notably with NESCAC (New England Small College Athletic Conference) presidents, taking into account the latest data about the spread of the virus.

Turning briefly to the subject of student mental health needs, the president noted the challenges students face when isolated in a hotel room at the Rodeway Inn. She worries about the impact of this experience on them. Professors Umphrey and Martini wondered whether students placed in isolation because of COVID-19 could spend time together, given that they already have the virus. President Martin said that she will look into this matter.

Conversation returned to the topic of the academic calendar for the next academic year. Provost Epstein noted that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has expressed concerns about the Committee of Six's proposal to have Monday classes running on the Wednesday start date (August 31) and not to hold classes on Labor Day, and the impact of doing so. If adopted, this proposal would lead to a scenario in which some classes (in particular, Monday seminars and labs) that would meet on the first Wednesday (August 31) would not meet again until September 12, the last day of the add-drop period. In addition, some Five-College students would likely miss more than one class under this schedule. With the university's later start, it would be a challenge for UMass students to be settled in their residence halls and be ready to take classes on August 31, the provost noted. The members wondered if students who had classes late in the day would be able to add or drop courses on September 12, as some classes could end after the 5:00 P.M. deadline. The provost said that the registrar's office will assist students in this situation individually, preferring to offer exceptions and not to extend the add-drop period for all students. The committee, while acknowledging these issues, still felt that preserving the Labor Day holiday is very important, particularly for staff morale. Some members asked if other schools have classes on Labor Day. The provost said that this is not uncommon. Some members commented that no other Five-College institution plans to have classes on Labor Day. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez, who agreed with the Committee of Six's proposal, asked how students would be informed that a Monday schedule would be followed on the first day of class, which would be on Wednesday. Provost Epstein

said that the Office of Student Affairs and the Office of the Registrar will send numerous messages to students, shifting one day's schedule to a different day has happened many times before; it is a regular occurrence at UMass, she noted. It was agreed that the Committee of Six's proposed calendar should be brought to a vote. (Later, concerns about the Committee of Six's proposal led the provost to inform the members that the CEP would like to weigh in, and that the faculty's vote would be delayed until January or beyond.) The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty