

The twelfth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2021–2022 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 9:30 A.M. on Thursday, December 2, 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 President Martin asking the members for their thoughts about the possibility of the president holding some gatherings for faculty, staff, and students in which she would share updates and take questions. Basically, the sessions would be an opportunity for the president to offer an end-of-semester review, to look forward to the next semester, and to answer questions. The committee agreed that this would be a good idea and suggested that the meetings take place via Zoom. After discussing the timing of the conversation with the faculty, which it was agreed should be Tuesday, December 7, at 7:30 P.M., President Martin decided to move forward with these plans.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Clotfelter asked about plans to offer another COVID-19 vaccine booster clinic. Provost Epstein responded that the first clinic, which had just been held, was very popular, and that another clinic for students, faculty, and staff is slated for December 9. President Martin commented that the college is considering mandating boosters for all members of the college community for the spring semester.

Provost Epstein next informed the members that, at the November 12 meeting of the chairs of academic departments and programs, some chairs had raised concerns surrounding the process for articulating departmental tenure expectations. The focus had been on whether pre-tenure colleagues should play any role in this work, as participants and/or observers. Some chairs had also wondered if departmental expectations for tenure would apply to current tenure-track faculty, or just to future hires. Finally, some chairs had inquired if plans call for allowing departments to update departmental expectations periodically and, if doing so is allowed, how it is envisioned any resulting lack of consistency would be addressed.

Discussion turned first to the question of the role that tenure-track faculty might play in the process of articulating their department’s tenure expectations. The members agreed on the importance of making it clear to everyone that the goal of documenting these expectations is to provide greater clarity about existing standards, as requested by tenure-track faculty. These expectations would have been shared with colleagues at the time of appointment and in the years thereafter, it was noted. The committee stressed the importance of recognizing that creating new expectations for tenure is not the goal of this work. Most members, the president, and the provost concurred that tenure-track faculty should not be involved in articulating departmental expectations, with some differing views expressed on related issues. On the question of whether pre-tenure colleagues should be present during departmental conversations about tenure expectations, most members agreed that this would not be appropriate, and that taking this approach could possibly create anxiety for tenure-track faculty and contribute to a sense of division between tenured and untenured colleagues. While the intention might be to give pre-tenure colleagues a voice in this work, it was noted that the expectations for tenure are not open to negotiation—and that it is the responsibility of the tenured faculty to articulate the expectations and to judge whether they have been met. Professors Manion, Martini, and Umphrey shared this viewpoint. Professor Clotfelter, who also did not feel that pre-tenure faculty should weigh in on departmental tenure expectations, commented that he would not find it problematic to have tenure-track faculty observe departmental conversations about tenure expectations. Professor Martini suggested that, after the tenured faculty complete the departmental expectations document, it could perhaps be shared with tenure-track faculty, to assess whether the expectations were clear. Most members, the president, and the provost disagreed that this approach should be taken, emphasizing that defining what is clear and what is not clear should not be a negotiated process.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Schroeder Rodríguez said that he feels strongly that tenure-track faculty should be permitted to participate in these conversations, both to express their views

and to listen. He noted that, while the committee has worked to clarify the criteria for tenure at the college level, departments are now being asked to consider the evidence that they will use to decide whether these criteria are being met at the department level. In his view, pre-tenure colleagues should be allowed to weigh in, for example, on trends in the discipline (e.g., the place of community-engaged scholarship) that relate to their scholarship that should be considered as such evidence. Other members, the president, and the provost commented that the moment of articulating departmental tenure standards is not the time to engage in this kind of discussion. Professor Vaughan wondered if there might be constructive ways to communicate with tenure-track faculty during the process of developing departmental tenure expectations, while making it clear that this work is the responsibility of tenured faculty.

In regard to grandfathering, the members agreed that, since the expectations that departments will be documenting will be the same as those that they have been sharing with tenure-track faculty all along, the expectations should apply to all current and future tenure-track faculty at Amherst; grandfathering is not needed. In regard to creating inconsistency by revising departmental tenure expectations, the committee concurred that, since the standards of the discipline evolve slowly and because departments should focus on broad expectations rather than specifics when articulating these expectations, it should not be necessary to change the documents very often—perhaps reviewing the expectations every decade should be the aspiration, it was noted. Any substantive changes to departmental expectations would be reviewed by the Committee of Six, as will the first iterations of the tenure expectations documents, the provost commented. She suggested that departments complete their documents this spring, and that the Committee of Six review them in the fall. The committee suggested that a March 1, 2022, deadline to complete the documents would be best. If a department experiences difficulty in arriving at consensus around tenure expectations, they should contact the provost for assistance, it was agreed. At the conclusion of the discussion, Provost Epstein thanked the committee and said that she and Associate Provost Tobin would draft a note for the chairs about these issues and the committee's views. They would then share the document with the members to get their input. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 11:13 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty