

The twentieth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2020–2021 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 3:30 P.M. on Tuesday, December 8, 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 Professor Trapani commenting on how much he had learned from the first conversation in the [President's Colloquium on Race and Racism](#). This event, which had taken place on December 3, had featured Anthony Jack '07, an assistant professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Shutzer Assistant Professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and Imani Perry, Hughes-Rogers Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University and a faculty associate with the programs in law and public affairs, gender and sexuality studies, and jazz studies. Professor Trapani thanked the president for organizing the series.

Turning to another topic, Professor Trapani suggested that, at some point, the committee return to a topic that he had raised over the summer—exploring the adoption of a structure in which one Committee of Six might focus on faculty personnel matters, while another addresses executive committee work. In his experience so far, he has found that, even with a course release, the workload of the Committee of Six is quite heavy, particularly in combination with another significant service obligation. He noted the high number of personnel cases that the committee will consider in the spring and the challenges he believes that he will face doing this work without the benefit of another course release. Further, he noted that, in cases in which faculty members are both chairing a department and serving on the Committee of Six, which seems to happen regularly, he worries that both important duties may suffer from a lack of adequate time to carry out each of them to the best of one's ability. Professor del Moral said that she also can see the benefit of splitting the functions of the committee.

Provost Epstein responded that the committee could certainly consider this proposition, on which the Committee of Six has weighed in many times over the years. One argument has been that divorcing the responsibilities of personnel and the work of the executive committee could allow for more sustained focus on college-wide matters. A counterargument has been that, under the current structure of the Committee of Six, the members' experience of being immersed in personnel matters gives them a valuable perspective from which to address college-wide issues. Provost Epstein noted that another counterargument has been that the faculty committee that does some of the most important work of the college should be the same committee that does the most important work in regard to faculty personnel matters. Professor del Moral said that, in her experience thus far, it seems that these two forms of work do not intersect. In regard to workload, Provost Epstein said that she has observed that past members of the committee, knowing that they would have one course release a year while serving, have sometimes chosen to stay on the committee for a second year when it would have been possible for them not to continue because they were eligible for leave.

On a somewhat related note, several members said that it would be useful for them and their departments to know soon whether they will be serving on the committee next year. Since all six members are new to the committee this year, and no one is planning to be on leave next year, three members must rotate off, in accordance with the faculty legislation that requires that "at least three of the members of the Committee of Six are elected in the spring of each year by direct faculty ballot." (See [Faculty Handbook, IV., S., 1.](#)) It was agreed that, relatively soon, the committee would use a virtual version of the practice of drawing straws to determine which members would rotate off the committee.

The members next discussed a request from Professor Sims and Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, to reactivate the Sanctuary Stewardship Committee, which in the past had played a role in the oversight of Amherst's Wildlife Sanctuary and which had been deactivated previously. Professor Sims and J. Brassord feel that, as part of an effort to move forward with a "Mammoth Trails" project for the college's bicentennial, reactivating the committee would provide continued long-term direction and facilitate the sustainability and engaged use of the sanctuary. Professor Sims and J. Brassord are proposing revising the committee and making the following changes to the existing charter and

structure: adjusting the committee's charge so that it references stewarding inclusive use of the space, and adjusting the mechanisms for appointing staff members to the committee in a way that ensures more connection to student programming and complementary uses of the space. Specifically, they feel that one staff member should be designated to represent the Office of Student Affairs or the resource centers, one staff member should be the director of the Book and Plow farm, and one staff member should be drawn from the areas of Athletics and Wellness. They are also suggesting adding another member of Buildings and Grounds, another faculty member, and another student (particularly because student schedules sometimes make it difficult for them to attend meetings). The changes to the committee's charge that Professor Sims and J. Brassord are proposing appear below.

The Amherst College Wildlife Sanctuary Stewardship Committee is composed of ~~two~~ **THREE** members of the Faculty, ~~the Director of Facilities Planning and Management~~ **THE CHIEF OF CAMPUS OPERATIONS**, the Grounds Supervisor **AND A DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE**, ~~two~~ **THREE** other staff members (~~either Trustee appointees or staff appointees~~), and ~~two~~ **THREE** students. The faculty members of the committee are appointed by the Committee of Six and serve for three-year terms. ~~The Advisory Committee on Personnel Policies~~ **THE SENIOR STAFF** appoints the staff members, who **SHALL INCLUDE ONE REPRESENTATIVE FROM STUDENT AFFAIRS OR THE RESOURCE CENTERS, ONE REPRESENTATIVE FROM ATHLETICS AND WELLNESS, AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE BOOK AND PLOW FARM AND** serve three-year terms. The ~~two~~ **THREE** student members of the committee are ~~elected~~ **APPOINTED** by the Association of Amherst Students each year. The committee, which is charged with the long-term oversight and management of the sanctuary, recommends priorities and policies; oversees academic, research, and other uses of the sanctuary; and acts as a steward for the sanctuary's wildlife and habitats **AND FOR THE INCLUSIVE USE OF THIS SPACE**. The committee may be advised by **OTHER MEMBERS OF FACILITIES AND GROUNDS**, the conservation director (current or former) of the town of Amherst, and other consultants." There is some urgency to it in order that a revised committee might play a role in planning for the bicentennial. If that is desired, a new committee should be appointed and meet during the January term.

Professor Kingston, while acknowledging that he finds the rationale for the proposal compelling, expressed some concern that a committee that had been deactivated previously would now be reconstituted. Further, he said that, given the service burdens of the faculty already, he worries that the proposal includes adding another professor to the membership of the committee. He asked if membership on this committee will count as faculty members' service if the proposal is approved. Provost Epstein said that she believes that the committee will not meet frequently, and she noted that those who have served in the past have been on other committees at the same time. In response to questions about the Mammoth Trails project, President Martin said that it is her understanding that it involves renewing the sanctuary trails system and promoting increased access to and use of this resource for the college and region, in support of sustainability and wellness. The goal is to revitalize and upgrade existing trails and improve wayfinding and information. The project will also involve coordinating related bicentennial events showcasing the sanctuary. The members expressed support for the project and recommended that the Wildlife Sanctuary Stewardship Committee be reconstituted as an ad hoc committee for the period necessary to complete the trails project. Professor Umphrey suggested that establishing a public space committee in the future might be useful.

On a related note, Professor Trapani once again expressed concern that not all faculty committee service is tracked and credited, including service on some of the college's [compliance committees](#).

Provost Epstein said that her office tracks faculty service for standing committees (those that are included in the *Faculty Handbook* with voted charges, the members of which are largely appointed by the Committee of Six). The new Workday system may make it possible to more easily track other committee service, she noted. She will consult with her office about this matter.

Conversation turned to two options for a revised spring 2021 academic calendar that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) had forwarded to the Committee of Six ([see a letter from Professor Melillo](#), chair of the CEP, which includes a link to the options). The provost had previously discussed with the committee the reasons—which center around protecting the health of the community during the time of COVID-19—for starting the semester later than originally planned. Maximizing the time when everyone can be outdoors will be very helpful, as the fall semester revealed, the provost said. Other schools are also considering, or have already adopted this approach, she noted. Provost Epstein commented that both options have the spring semester starting on February 15, include one-day and two-day breaks, and would achieve the goal of ending the semester in time to allow students to pursue summer opportunities and faculty to preserve time for research. Under both proposed options, the semester would conclude by the end of May. Commencement (which will likely be virtual) would take place on May 30. (The provost noted that, even if students on campus are permitted to attend a commencement ceremony, all graduating students would not receive their degrees until June, in order to give the registrar's office time to process them.)

Professor Kingston expressed a slight preference for option one. He noted that missing a Monday but not a Tuesday in week six (as in option two) might be awkward; under this scenario, he pointed out that, for some classes (Monday/Wednesday), it would mean effectively missing half a week, while for others, (Tuesday/ Thursday), it would mean not missing any class time. Later, the same thing would happen in reverse, when a Thursday and Friday would be missed. He feels that it would be better to miss a Monday and Tuesday together (as in option one), so that everyone gets half a week off at the same time, particularly when there may be multiple sections that want to stay in sync. Professor Trapani said that he prefers having a Monday/Tuesday break. He wondered if one option would better serve courses that are taught one day a week, labs, or courses that meet twice a week. Provost Epstein responded that she feels that both options are workable. Her only preference is that the one-day break precede the two-day break, as faculty and students will need a longer break later in the term, in her view. Provost Epstein asked the members how they would feel about having an even later start date, which would mean extending the spring semester into June. The committee agreed that doing so would not be the best approach (such a change would intrude on faculty research time and students' ability to be competitive for summer internships and jobs), and that a February 15 start date seems like a good compromise.

President Martin noted that a small number of students have written to her to express concern about delaying the start of the semester. Most of the issues that they have raised center around the start and end dates of leases that students have signed to live off campus this spring. Provost Epstein noted that, if the start date is delayed, she anticipates that college will need to allow some students to return to campus early, as their circumstances may leave them with no place else to go during the time in between the original start date and the new one. President Martin said that, while she appreciates the concerns that students have shared thus far, mitigating the risk of COVID-19 is the priority, which argues for a later start date. The committee agreed and expressed support for bringing [option one](#) to the faculty for a vote at the December 15 faculty meeting. After President Martin noted that Baystate appears to be filling up with COVID-19 patients, a member asked if the college has plans to provide the vaccine to the college community when it becomes available. The president said that it is premature to make plans at this point, as it is unclear whether the vaccine will be made available directly to colleges and universities.

The committee returned briefly to an issue surrounding the inclusion of the language of *protected class* in the members' proposal to amend the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom (see the

final proposal at the end of these minutes), given that many will not know what categories fall under *protected classes*. While the college's non-discrimination statement was added to the end of the proposal to amend the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom, and the non-discrimination statement does list the categories, it is not stated explicitly that they are the ones that fall under the term *protected class*. Even so, most members agreed that clear definitions of the categories are readily available (including simply by Googling the term *protected classes*), and that it is desirable to use this language because it is consistent with Amherst's non-discrimination policies and the law. After further discussion, most members agreed that it doesn't seem appropriate or necessary to include the non-discrimination statement itself as a footnote as part of the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom, and it was removed from the proposed amendment.

The members next reviewed the faculty meeting agenda for the December 15 faculty meeting and then voted on three motions. They voted six in favor and zero opposed on the substance of the motion to revise the spring 2021 calendar (see [option one](#)), and six in favor and zero opposed to forward the motion to the faculty. They then voted six in favor and zero opposed on the substance of the motion to amend the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom, the relevant section of which is shown below, and six in favor and zero opposed to forward the amendment to the faculty. They also voted six in favor and zero opposed on the substance of a motion to eliminate the flexible-grading option and replace it with a new pass-fail policy (see motion below), and six in favor and zero opposed to forward the motion to the faculty. They then voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward the faculty meeting agenda to the faculty.

#### **Proposal to Amend the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom**

Even the most vigorous defense of intellectual and creative freedom knows limits. The college may properly restrict speech that, for example, is defamatory, harassing, invades a protected right to privacy or confidentiality, constitutes incitement to imminent violence, or otherwise violates the law. **IT MAY ALSO RESTRICT DISPARAGING OR ABUSIVE SPEECH (E.G., RACIAL EPITHETS) DIRECTED AT AN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP BASED ON THEIR ACTUAL OR PERCEIVED AFFILIATION WITH A PROTECTED CLASS, AND FOR WHICH THERE IS NO REASONABLE ACADEMIC, EDUCATIONAL, OR ARTISTIC JUSTIFICATION. THE COLLEGE** ‡ may place reasonable limitations on the time, place, and manner of expression, and may restrict speech that directly interferes with core instructional and administrative functions of the college. But these restrictions and limitations must be understood as narrow exceptions to the college's overriding commitment to robust open inquiry (voted by the faculty, May 3, 2016).

*Amherst College subscribes fully to the AAUP statements of principles on academic freedom published in 1940, and assumes that faculty members know their rights and their responsibilities as members of the academic profession.*

#### **Flexible-Grading Option/Pass-Fail Motion**

That the flexible grading option (FGO) be eliminated and that the language describing it in the *Amherst College Catalog* be removed; that a new pass/fail policy be adopted and that the language describing this policy (shown below in **red caps**) replace the current language (shown struck below) describing Flexible Grading and Pass/Fail Options in the Regulations & Requirements section of the *Amherst College Catalog*. If approved, these changes would take effect on July 1, 2021, with the following exception: by previous vote of the faculty, FGOs used in

spring 2020 will not count against the maximum number of FGOs that students are allowed; one FGO used in each term of the 2020–2021 academic year will also not count against this maximum.

#### ~~FLEXIBLE GRADING OPTION (FGO)~~

~~The purpose of the Flexible Grading Option (FGO) is to encourage students to explore the breadth of Amherst's open curriculum as they seek to meet the college's stated learning goals. Students who enter Amherst College as first years may elect to take up to four of the total number of courses required for the degree under the FGO; transfer students who enter as sophomores may elect to take up to three courses required for the degree under the FGO; and transfer students who enter as juniors may elect to take up to two courses required for the degree under the FGO. Students may not take more than one such course in any one semester. Courses taken in the second semester of the senior year are not eligible for the FGO.~~

~~To elect a course as FGO, students must file the FGO form, signed by their advisor(s), with the Office of the Registrar by the end of the add-drop period. Instructor permission is not required on the FGO form, and instructors are not informed if students have elected the FGO option for their course.~~

~~Students will have five days after the date grades are due to either accept the grade assigned by the instructor, or, in the case of passing grades ("D" or better), elect to have a pass ("P") displayed on their transcript for the course. (No grade-point equivalent will be assigned to a "Pass.") If the letter grade assigned by the instructor is an "F," an "F" will be recorded. If the student takes no action, the assigned grade will remain on the transcript.~~

~~Second-semester seniors who have not exhausted their FGO options may select one course to be taken Pass/Fail. To do this, seniors submit a Pass/Fail form, signed by their advisor(s) and the course instructor, to the registrar by the end of the add-drop period. (No grade-point equivalent will be assigned to a "Pass.")~~

~~In exceptional circumstances, and only once during their career at Amherst College, students who have not previously exhausted their FGOs and have not elected an FGO in that semester may, with the permission of their instructor, academic advisor, and class dean, convert one course to an FGO after the end of the add/drop period.~~

~~In exceptional circumstances, and only once during their career at Amherst College, students may, with the permission of their instructor, academic advisor, and class dean, convert one course to Pass/Fail after the end of the add/drop period.~~

#### **PASS-FAIL (P/F) GRADING OPTION**

**THE AIM OF THE PASS-FAIL (P/F) OPTION IS TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TAKE**

INTELLECTUAL RISKS, TO EXPLORE THE BREADTH OF AMHERST'S OPEN CURRICULUM, AND TO REWARD STUDENTS FOR ENGAGING FULLY IN ALL THEIR COURSES. UNDER THIS OPTION, STUDENTS MAY ELECT TO DECLARE ONE COURSE PER SEMESTER, AND NO MORE THAN FOUR COURSES OVER FOUR YEARS, TO BE TAKEN PASS-FAIL. A DECLARATION OF PASS-FAIL REQUIRES THE PERMISSION OF THE STUDENT'S ADVISOR(S) AND MUST BE MADE BEFORE THE FINAL DAY OF THE EXAM PERIOD. IF A STUDENT DESIGNATES A COURSE PASS-FAIL, THE STUDENT'S TRANSCRIPT WILL HAVE A "P" RECORDED IN THE CASE OF PASSING GRADES ("D" OR HIGHER). NO GRADE-POINT EQUIVALENT WILL BE ASSIGNED TO A "P." IF THE LETTER GRADE ASSIGNED BY THE INSTRUCTOR IS AN "F," AN "F" WILL BE RECORDED ON THE STUDENT'S TRANSCRIPT AND WILL COUNT TOWARD THE STUDENT'S GPA AND CLASS RANK. ONCE STUDENTS HAVE DECLARED A COURSE PASS-FAIL, THEY CANNOT LATER OPT FOR THE GRADE. STUDENTS ADMITTED AS FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS MAY ELECT THE PASS-FAIL OPTION FOUR TIMES DURING THEIR AMHERST COLLEGE CAREER. TRANSFER STUDENTS ADMITTED AS SOPHOMORES SHALL HAVE THREE PASS-FAIL OPTIONS, AND THOSE ADMITTED AS JUNIORS SHALL HAVE TWO. THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR IS NOT ELIGIBLE TO BE TAKEN PASS/FAIL.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty