

The thirteenth 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 9, 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 “Questions from Committee Members.” Professor Martini thanked the president for meeting with the faculty earlier in the week to provide information and answer questions about college matters. She asked President Martin for further details about [the Drake](#), a new performance space and bar that will open in Amherst this winter. President Martin had shared the news about plans for the Drake at the meeting. The president responded that, in honor of the college’s bicentennial and to help with several ongoing projects, including the Drake, Amherst will be making two monetary gifts to the town. The specifics will be announced soon.

Continuing with questions, Professor Clotfelter inquired about plans for meeting the responsibilities of the position of chief of campus operations, when Jim Brassord steps down from his day-to-day duties after his retirement at the end of March and makes the transition to serving in an advisory role for one year. President Martin informed the members that she had just met with J. Brassord’s leadership team to discuss ideas for the structure of the division going forward. One model under consideration is to have the leaders of the units that currently report to J. Brassord report instead to the chief financial and administrative officer, once Kevin Weinman’s successor is appointed. Most of Amherst’s peers take this approach to the administration of campus operations, President Martin noted. The president informed the members that she will be meeting with the members of the leadership team again soon to learn more about their views on the structure that they feel will be best to accomplish the work of the division in the near and long term. An announcement will be made to the community after decisions are finalized, the president said.

Discussion turned to the proposal that the Committee of Six be split into 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. Ahead of the meeting, the provost had shared information that she had gathered from chief academic officers of twenty-five schools in the Northeast who had responded to a brief questionnaire she had sent to them about the governance structure of their institutions. Interestingly, among the schools represented by the respondents, only one institution has a structure that resembles Amherst’s—with a single committee serving as the executive committee and tenure and promotion committee. The rest have separate committees to carry out these functions.

Continuing the conversation, the members noted that responses to the recent survey about the committee structure at the college indicated that many colleagues—including those who have served on the Committee of Six in the past—favored splitting the Committee of Six. While recognizing the importance of Amherst’s traditions and the central role in faculty governance that the Committee of Six has played over many years, the members were unanimous in their view that the needs of the college and the faculty have changed—and that the current faculty governance structure is no longer the most effective. The committee agreed that a proposal to split the Committee of Six should be brought to the faculty. The members felt that shifting the time-consuming, burgeoning, and important work surrounding reappointment, tenure, and promotion to another committee would allow the executive committee to have more time to focus on central governance matters and to consider issues more thoroughly. The committee would also be able to take a more proactive approach, it was noted; at present, the Committee of Six tends to be reactive, advantaging the consideration of proposals brought forward by individuals and different constituencies, rather than having the time to set priorities based on an assessment of governance needs. President Martin commented that, in her experience, the need to focus on faculty personnel processes during much of the year leaves little time for the president to consult with the Committee of Six about important college matters. While the decision is up to the

faculty of course, in her view, faculty governance would be strengthened if the committee were split. Provost Epstein concurred.

The members discussed how best to move forward. The committee agreed that bringing a proposal to the faculty should be done as soon as possible, while also noting the complexities of developing the charge of the imagined executive committee in time to effect change before the next Committee of Six election; that election typically takes place prior to spring break. The charge of a tenure and promotion committee is clear, all agreed. Provost Epstein suggested that a proposal to establish a separate tenure and promotion committee, including details surrounding its membership and the selection process for this body, be brought forward this spring. If approved, the committee could begin work in the summer of 2022. With the exception of carrying out its work surrounding faculty personnel processes, the executive committee, which could be elected in the traditional manner this spring, could continue to function as the Committee of Six does now, while developing a proposal for a formal charge for itself over the course of the next academic year. The members agreed that this would be a reasonable way to move forward. Due to the importance of this matter, some members felt that any proposals that are brought forward could be imagined as three-year pilots.

Concluding the conversation, the members suggested that the possibility of changing the charge of the Committee of Six and establishing a separate tenure and promotion committee presents another reason for the faculty to consider the current committee structure as a whole, as the relative status of committees could become less clear. The members agreed that this should be a topic of conversation when the committee meets with consultant Susan Pierce to discuss the committee structure on December 15.

Provost Epstein next informed the members that there has been a delay in bringing a proposal for the calendar for the next academic year forward for a faculty vote because the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has not yet set its start date. It is expected to do so next week. If the university decides to start after Labor Day, this will have an impact on Amherst's ability to start classes on August 31, as the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) and the Committee of Six are recommending. She said that she would keep the committee posted about how this issue unfolds. On a related note, the members considered briefly [a letter signed by eighteen faculty members](#) requesting that the issue of whether to continue to have a January term in future years be discussed in depth by the Committee of Six and brought to the faculty for discussion at a faculty meeting. Provost Epstein commented that there are a number of administrative/academic policy matters and curricular issues to consider regarding this matter, and she feels that it would be best to consider the issue after the 2022 January term concludes; there would then be two iterations of this model at Amherst to evaluate. The members referred the matter to the CEP, agreeing that the request falls within its purview. 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