

The nineteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2021–2022 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, February 28, 2022. Present via Zoom, 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.

Following up on a question asked at the committee's February 21 meeting, the provost reported back about what she had learned about matters relating to the availability of medical abortions at the college and insurance coverage. Dr. Emily Jones, director of student health services, informed the provost that medical abortion is covered by the college's student insurance, noting that the drug is a tier one medication with a co-pay of \$15.00. Dr. Jones said that about 50 percent of Amherst students are on student insurance. Students who do not have student insurance and are considered to have high financial need can submit bills or receipts to financial aid for payment or reimbursement, she noted. Or, if such students have the medication delivered directly to Amherst's health center, center staff can submit the cost to financial aid for them, and it will be covered. Dr. Jones also said that, for those who have other insurance that does not cover abortion services, or have insurance but don't want the medication to appear on an explanation of benefits that is sent home, the college has referred students to the Western Mass Abortion Fund. There are grants available through this fund, although individuals are expected to contribute amounts they can afford on a sliding scale, she said. Dr. Jones noted that she believes that this fund is mostly accessed for surgical abortion, as that procedure is much more expensive than medical abortion; Dr. Jones said that she has assisted students on a couple of occasions to access and utilize this funding source, she said.

Turning to another topic, Provost Epstein informed the members that she has been receiving some questions about a make-up day for classes that were canceled due to inclement weather on February 25. The provost said that it is likely that the make-up day will take place on May 16, which is during the reading period, but that the decision about a make-up day has not been finalized yet, due to the possibility that bad weather during the spring might result in other snow days/cancellations.

Concluding her remarks, the provost said that she has received a request for the committee to meet with consultants Gina Smith and Leslie Gomez, as part of their work on the college's sexual misconduct review. The consultants would like to hear the members' views on a variety of topics that may include policies and procedures regarding sex- and gender-based harassment and violence, mandated reporting, student culture, and other topics. Provost Epstein noted that G. Smith and L. Gomez will be conducting listening sessions over the next two weeks and said that her office will be in touch about scheduling a session with some or all Committee of Six members, depending on members' availability.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Schroeder Rodríguez asked, on behalf of the ad hoc committee tasked with evaluating January term, what the timeline would be for adopting a January term on a permanent basis, should the ad hoc committee bring a recommendation forward to do so. Provost Epstein said that the schedule outlined in the ad hoc committee's charge, though tight and if the ad hoc committee can meet the necessary deadline, would allow a vote to take place at the final faculty meeting of this academic year, which is set for May 26. The timeline for future January terms will depend on the recommendation brought forward and the outcome of a vote—and when that vote takes place—she said.

Given the surge in COVID-19 cases among students at this time, with more than one hundred currently in isolation, Professor Martini inquired about plans that are in place should the college use all of its available isolation space. President Martin and Provost Epstein said that it is hoped that the number of cases will soon decline, commenting that Hampshire County has been a hotspot for the virus. The college has other options if additional students need to be in isolation, including having students isolate in their rooms, if necessary.

Concluding the committee's questions, Professor Clotfelter asked when staff in shared offices, and by mutual agreement, will be allowed to work without wearing masks, and when everyone will be able to be in

their offices, unmasked, with the door open. He noted that students are allowed to be unmasked in their residence halls, which seems equivalent. The provost commented that this is not really equivalent, given that staff and faculty are required to work in their offices in proximity to others; students in dorms do not need to be in common rooms of their residence halls, if they are uncomfortable with fellow students not masking. It was also noted that some offices will not allow for social distancing due to their square footage. President Martin said that the college will continue to consider the appropriate timing for relaxing some protocols, depending on the course of the pandemic.

Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, joined the meeting at 2:40 p.m. to respond to Professor Manion's concerns about the college's current data system for tracking whether students have met major and graduation requirements and prerequisites for courses in which they might want to enroll, and her question about whether an interim system might be adopted until Workday Student is put in place. J. Barba noted that some of the complexity involved in the processes that Professor Manion had mentioned are a function of the number of permissions that the college requires rather than the technology alone. He suggested that it might be helpful to reexamine which permissions are truly necessary to grant different kinds of requests; in his view, the required permissions are sometimes more rule-based than substantive. In regard to the idea of putting some kind of interim system in place during the period before Workday Student is online, he said that it would not be practical to do so. As it is, a great deal of staff time is being devoted to coming up with Workday systems that will allow all the necessary functions to take place in the right order. Some stopgap measures have been put in place, however. For example, the registrar's office has added a Google-Form solution for requesting that a course be changed to pass/fail. The office will also now accept permissions via email for some requests, J. Barba noted. In such cases, students are asked to send all the pieces of a request in a package so that staff members do not have to sort through multiple emails relating to a single request. Another one of many reasons for simply staying the course is that plans call for having only one more registration period before Workday Student is live. Anything that would be done on a temporary basis now would require a great deal of work, and the college does not have the staffing needed to focus on such an effort—particularly when so much energy is being devoted to Workday.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Martini asked if Workday Student will improve the student experience with these processes, and that of chairs and ADCs, in regard to collecting needed permissions. J. Barba said that there should be a world of difference after Workday Student is implemented, though of course no system will be perfect. The processes should be more transparent, as each business practice will be discrete in Workday, with approvals flowing one at a time, he said. At different stages, notifications will be provided, rather than approvals. He also explained that it will be possible for departments to decide whether some of the chair's approvals may be entered into Workday by the ADC. Professor Manion thanked J. Barba for this information, noting that she had thought that there would be a longer delay in implementing Workday Student. She asked whether the new system will be compatible with Moodle. J. Barba responded that the data integration is under way now. He noted, as an example of how the system will work, that, if prerequisites are listed in the catalog, the system will automatically enforce them. On the other hand, many faculty members will still want students to check in with them if they have not met a prerequisite but are still petitioning to take a class. The system is being built to allow for that approach as well. J. Barba said that there is a lack of uniformity among departments in this regard. When it comes to major requirements, those involved in implementing Workday Student are working with some departments that have volunteered to have their requirements encoded into Workday. It will be possible, if a department wishes, to click on a box to verify that a student has completed the requirements of the major. On the other hand, the degree-audit portion of Workday Student will be a one-, two-, or three-year project, J. Barba explained. The committee thanked J. Barba for the helpful information that he had provided, and he left the meeting at 3:00 P.M.

Conversation turned to the envisioned Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) and Tenure and Promotion Committee (TPC), a continuation of the conversation that had begun at the February 21 meeting about the makeup of the two committees, how their members might be selected, and the responsibilities of the two bodies. In regard to size and makeup, the initial view of most members was that the FEC should comprise four faculty members and the president and the provost and dean of the faculty (serving ex officio and without vote) who would serve for a term of two years, and that the TPC should comprise five faculty members and the president and dean of the faculty (serving ex officio and without vote), who would also serve for two years. The committee also considered whether there might be an election process that would result in a slate of nominees from which the executive committee would select the next year's committee members, or a direct election. Initially, most members favored an elect/appoint model, with the goal of creating a committee that is representative of the diversity of the entire faculty, to the extent possible. In regard to having tenure-track faculty serve on the committee, the committee felt that having such representation would be important, though not coming to a conclusion about the way in which pre-tenure colleagues might be selected, and whether they should be able to opt in or opt out of the election process. The question of exemptions that should be in place in regard to the ballot was also discussed briefly. At present, exemptions are granted for a number of reasons, including for current and past service on some major faculty committees ([See Faculty Handbook IV.1., S. a.](#)). The idea of increasing the number of available faculty by changing some of the exemptions was considered, though some members felt that doing so might result in the same small group of faculty be available to serve and ending up on the FEC and TPC, when, ideally, all eligible faculty should be engaged in service on these and other committees. In addition, the committee felt that, for the next year, it could be beneficial for current members of the Committee of Six to serve on one of the two new committees, for the sake of continuity. Most members also felt that the FEC's agenda for its first year should include taking up the issue of the committee structure at the college and making recommendations for transformative changes.

Shifting the course of the conversation, Professor Manion expressed the view that the proposal to split the Committee of Six doesn't necessarily make sense, without moving forward with the complementary proposal to fold the work of other committees into the FEC—for example, the responsibilities of the Committee on Priorities and Resources. If the latter proposal is no longer under consideration, she is unsure what the charge of the FEC would be, and she worries that more faculty will need to serve on the two separate committees, without the benefits that would come from eliminating other committees and freeing colleagues from less meaningful service obligations. She asked what the argument would be for splitting the Committee of Six, if taking up the broader question of committee structure is off the table. Some members agreed that there might be less reason to split the Committee of Six at this point, while others argued that one major reason for doing so is to have more diverse points of view represented on the executive committee, with personnel business not being part of its charge. The committee agreed to outline the responsibilities of the executive committee in detail in a revised draft charge, imagining that the FEC's responsibilities would include, for example representing faculty views to the administration on a wide range of college matters; preparing the agenda for faculty meetings; evaluating the committee structure on a regular basis and making recommendations to the faculty for changes; and following up on policies and recommendations approved by the faculty to ensure that they move forward.

Professor Manion said that she continues to wonder how the college's system of faculty governance would be strengthened simply by dividing the Committee of Six. President Martin commented on how valuable it would be to have a faculty body that is advisory to the president and the provost and that serves as a conduit for regular communication between the faculty and leadership of the college. Having a closer and more consistent relationship with the administration would give the faculty greater voice in important college matters, she noted. The president said that, while there is other work that an executive committee would do, she sees the communication function as primary. In her own experience,

since much of the Committee of Six's time has been taken up with personnel processes, other matters that are brought to the committee are usually of a pressing nature, rather than part of a pattern of sustained consultation. President Martin also argued for reducing the overall number of committees and eliminating those that are not a good use of faculty time. She also commented that retaining the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) is essential, since authority for the curriculum is delegated by the trustees directly to the faculty. Professor Manion agreed that having greater access to the administration to convey the views of the faculty is a compelling argument for constituting a separate faculty executive committee, as did the other members. The members agreed to continue the discussion of the FEC and TPC at their next meeting, using revised charges as a starting point for coming to consensus about the necessary details.

The meeting ended with a brief conversation about [the draft proposal, not yet finalized, from the CEP to revise the college's Latin honors system](#), which had been discussed initially at the February 21 Committee of Six meeting. Provost Epstein emphasized that the CEP would like guidance from the Committee of Six about whether the proposal seems viable and should be brought to the faculty. One member expressed a preference for moving away from the system of Latin honors altogether, finding that it results in exclusivity and inequities, and retain department-level honors only—while recognizing that such an approach would not be viable. It was noted that more students would be eligible for magna and summa honors under the CEP's proposal, and that moving to an eligibility system that would make use of median grades rather than class rank, in addition to a departmental thesis recommendation, would be more transparent. Some members expressed support for this idea. Students would know what they would need to aim for and where they stood. Another member expressed a preference for Latin honors to be awarded based on thesis work alone and not linked to grades, and also questioned the desirability of the modest breadth requirement that the CEP had proposed. Provost Epstein commented that many feel that Latin honors are the highest college-wide honor that can be awarded and thus should not be controlled by departments alone. Other members worried that the proposal would lead to even greater grade inflation, wondered how courses taken pass/fail would be factored into the median grade calculation for Latin honors, and expressed concern that the proposal would result in so many students receiving Latin honors that the designation would essentially no longer be meaningful. Some members said that, before they could support the proposal, they would need more detailed data about how many more students would be eligible for Latin honors if median grades rather than class rank became a determinative factor, in addition to the departmental thesis recommendation. In the end, the members did not reach consensus about the proposal. Provost Epstein said that she would convey the committee's views to the CEP. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty