

The seventeenth 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 7, 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.

The meeting began with Professor Umphrey asking whether the *Faculty Handbook* has been updated to reflect the changes to the college's housing program policies that were adopted at the end of last semester, and whether these changes will be communicated to the faculty (beyond the minutes of the committee's discussions about this topic). She also inquired whether notification of houses that are being put up for sale will be given anytime soon. Associate Provost Tobin said that the [description of the housing program](#) in the *Faculty Handbook* is up to date, with the exception of a couple of outstanding details that are still being resolved. Provost Epstein said that she would check in with Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, and report back about when information about houses that are for sale will be shared.

Continuing with questions, Professor Clotfelter expressed concern over a problem involving two National Science Foundation (NSF) grants, which affected two members of the faculty in very significant ways, and about the processes that will be in place going forward to try to prevent such a problem from happening again. Provost Epstein explained that complications resulting from a new registration requirement for doing business with the federal government (including grant submissions), set by the System for Award Management (SAM), and representing a change to a longstanding process, led to this problem. As a result, Amherst's registration status was not active for a brief period; meeting the new requirement required certain steps that took some time to complete, she noted. As a result, an NSF program officer declined to allow one faculty member to submit a grant proposal in this round of applications. Another colleague faced a number of challenges with an award that was already in progress. Ultimately, that issue was resolved, and the grant award is moving forward. Provost Epstein commented that this episode was serious, very unfortunate, and very frustrating, and she apologized on behalf of the college. The provost said that safeguards are being put in place to prevent an issue of this kind from occurring in the future. Professor Clotfelter suggested that it might be helpful to take a close look at the structure of the Grants Office at the college to ensure that it is optimal. The provost responded that this process is already under way. Associate Provost Jack Cheney, who is overseeing the Grants Office until a new director is hired, is working with colleagues on a self-study of both the Grants Office and the research administration function, which resides in the Office of the Controller—the first step in an external review that will be conducted by the [National Council of University Research Administrators \(NCURA\)](#). It is hoped that a visiting team will come to the college in May and that its report will be available by the end of May. The provost also informed the members that the Office of the Controller is considering adding another individual to the office to handle the accounting side of the grant process, allowing Darlene Sliwa, the research administrator, who works half time, to focus solely on compliance. Provost Epstein noted that the period of transition in the Grants Office presents an opportunity to take a fresh look at the structure and procedures of the grants and research administration function. Professor Clotfelter thanked the provost for undertaking this effort.

Professor Vaughan next asked the provost for an update on hiring for vacant positions in the area of information technology at the college. Provost Epstein said that she understands that it continues to be challenging to fill some vacant positions because of the many opportunities that are open to those in the field. She said that she would check in with David Hamilton, chief of information technology, about this issue and report back to the members.

Professor Martini inquired about the procedure used to reappoint senior lecturers at the college, commenting that reviewing teaching evaluations and submitting a departmental recommendation every five years—often over an Amherst career that spans decades—seems unnecessarily onerous for department(s). The process is onerous for senior lecturers, as well, she noted. The provost said that, as

the appointment of lecturers increases at the college, as an approach to addressing enrollment pressures in introductory courses within certain areas of the curriculum, a number of issues surrounding lecturers should be reviewed. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez concurred and suggested that the consideration be given to changing the title from *lecturer* to *assistant or associate professor of teaching*. Other institutions use these titles, and he feels that they convey this position's focus on teaching and would help colleagues feel more respected for their work.

Conversation turned briefly to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)'s proposal for the [academic calendar for 2022–2023](#). Provost Epstein said that she is hesitant to hold up a vote on the calendar any longer because of the issue of how to recognize staff who work on Labor day and other holidays (see details in the members' earlier discussion of this topic in the committee's minutes of January 31, 2022). As noted at the meeting of January 31, Kate Harrington, chief human resources officer, is examining this issue, but it will take some time. Staff members who have been consulted have said that they are not averse to working on Labor day, as long as their work is recognized in appropriate ways. In order to allow the semester to end in time for students to get home before the holidays, Provost Epstein said that she would like to bring the calendar forward to the faculty for a vote on February 15. Under the proposed calendar, classes would be held on Labor Day. In regard to recognizing staff, the members agreed that doing so should include a financial component, if possible. Provost Epstein said that the college is exploring how additional financial compensation could be included for exempt (salaried) staff in ways that meet legal requirements. Non-exempt staff (who are paid hourly) are already compensated. President Martin noted that, if such compensation is regularized, the funding to support this effort must be included in the college's budget. She expressed support for compensating staff who work on holidays, as did the committee. The members then voted six in favor and zero opposed on the substance of the calendar proposal and six in favor and zero opposed to forward the motion to approve the calendar to the faculty.

At 3:00 P.M., consultant Susan Resneck Pierce joined the meeting. In preparation for the February 15 faculty meeting in which she would give a presentation during a committee-of-the-whole conversation, S. Pierce reviewed with the committee a [memo to the faculty](#) that she had provided about her proposals surrounding the structure of committees at the college. The intention was to send the memo to the faculty, along with the agenda for the faculty meeting. Ahead of the Committee of Six's meeting, at the committee's request, S. Pierce also shared information about the features of tenure and promotion committees at some peer institutions.

The members then considered some questions that might arise surrounding the proposal to split the Committee of Six into two separate committees—a faculty executive committee and a reappointment, tenure, and promotion committee. For example, would any losses occur if this separation took place? What could be gained? Is it necessary to share at this time an imagined structure and election process for the two committees, in order to consider the question of splitting the Committee of Six? What about a recommendation on whether the president should be present during meetings of the reappointment, tenure, and promotion committee? What about sharing thoughts regarding the meeting schedule for the two committees? Would it be necessary at this time to provide details about the imagined streamlined committee structure? The members agreed that the question of whether to split the Committee of Six could be considered without knowing more details at this time. After gaining a better sense of the faculty's views, the members could work with S. Pierce to focus on such details. The committee also decided that the question of splitting the Committee of Six should be seen as the first phase of a proposal to transform the committee structure.

The members discussed some of the questions shared above in a preliminary way. For example, the provost said that she imagines that the reappointment, tenure, and promotion committee would only meet at certain times of year, when personnel cases would be considered. The executive committee might meet biweekly rather than weekly, as the Committee of Six does now, and have meetings that are

shorter in duration. If this structure were adopted, the president and provost would likely have time in their schedules to attend the meetings of both committees, if desired. The committee asked President Martin for her thoughts about whether the president should continue to attend meetings in which faculty personnel cases are discussed. The president expressed support for continuing with this structure, noting how important it has been for her to listen to the committee's discussions, including its final assessment of each case, in addition to evaluating the candidates' dossiers herself. The process also has helped her learn about the faculty's areas of scholarly and teaching focus, which has been helpful for a variety of reasons—among them getting to know the Amherst faculty, which has been a pleasure—and for her meetings with potential donors who wish to support the academic mission of the college. Several committee members expressed support for continuing to have the president present during faculty personnel deliberations, finding President Martin's reasoning to be compelling.

The committee also discussed in a preliminary way other salient issues vis-à-vis the committee that would focus on faculty personnel processes—e.g., whether a selection process should be put in place to ensure disciplinary diversity on the committee (some members felt this should be done), whether only associate and full professors should serve (most members felt this would be best), the terms of the members (perhaps two years), and some other points. Professor Manion expressed the view that it is not necessary to put new parameters in place. In regard to the executive committee, the members noted the expectation that adopting this structure, with the personnel processes removed from the governance committee's charge, would allow the executive committee to take on a leadership role. In addition, it was noted that, with the reduction of other committees as some of their work is folded into the executive committee, the service responsibility of many faculty members would be reduced under the proposal. The committee agreed that, in splitting the two committees, the intention would not be to create two co-equal committees. The executive committee is envisioned as being the key governance committee of the faculty, it was noted.

Concluding the conversation, the members decided to aim for bringing a motion to split the Committee of Six to the faculty on March 1, taking into account the faculty's response at the February 15 faculty meeting. Another goal will be to bring, later this spring, a proposal for a charge for the reappointment, tenure, and promotion committee and a proposal to revise the committee structure more broadly. The members thanked S. Pierce, and she left the meeting at 3:46 P.M. The committee then turned to personnel matters.

The members next reviewed a [revised version of a charge to the Ad Hoc Committee](#) to Evaluate the January Term that incorporated some of the members' points made the previous week. After approving the charge, the committee selected nominees to serve on the ad hoc committee. Professor Umphrey asked if the idea of having half-credit courses during January should be considered. Provost Epstein responded that adopting this approach should be considered for a variety of reasons, including to allow students with deficiencies to have more opportunities and flexibility to make them up. It was noted that it will be essential to consider the resources that would be needed to mount courses during January, including staffing, and the financial implications more broadly.

The meeting ended with a follow-up conversation about the Statement on [Remote Teaching and Learning](#) and [letter about this statement](#) that were forwarded by the CEP. While most members expressed support for the substance of this statement, they also felt that the ongoing impact of the pandemic could make it challenging to consider the issue of online teaching and learning through a lens that is not colored by the challenges and daily impact of the COVID-19 era. Once this emergency has receded, the faculty would be better situated to take up the matter of the role of technology in teaching, most members felt. At the same time, the president, the provost and most members agreed with the CEP that individual faculty members should not have the discretion to decide to teach remotely, a view of the faculty who had sent a letter to the committee this fall. This letter had prompted the CEP to draft its statement. Taken to an extreme, President Martin noted, remote

instruction could be considered a change in Amherst's mission as a residential liberal arts college that "is committed to learning through close colloquy." The decision to make such a change may well be in the purview of the board of trustees.

Returning to the question of whether to forward CEP's statement to the faculty, Provost Epstein reiterated her view that it would be helpful to have a statement on online learning that would represent the consensus of the faculty on this matter. Ideally, the faculty would vote on such a statement. She noted, as she had during the committee's last discussion, that current policies allowing for remote teaching were developed during an emergency under highly unusual circumstances and have not been formalized via regular faculty governance processes. The members agreed that it would be best, given the current state of the pandemic, because they feel that the current policies are serving college well, and because they do not feel it is urgent to take a vote on the CEP statement, to keep these policies in place—that an instructor may teach online for up to two weeks' worth of classes per semester, as long as the department chair is kept informed of the situation. As the CEP noted, under the policy, the purpose of permitting limited online teaching at Amherst is not for faculty members' convenience; it is to allow faculty to continue teaching under circumstances that otherwise would necessitate classes being canceled.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty