

The twenty-seventh meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2020–2021 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 p.m. on Monday, February 15, 2021. 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 “Questions from Committee Members.” Professor del Moral asked Provost Epstein about the schedule for discussing the letter that Professor Hicks had sent to the committee regarding the impact of the pandemic on tenure-track faculty, and the college’s response. Provost Epstein responded that the letter would be on the committee’s agenda very soon, hopefully for the members’ next meeting, but that tenure deliberations for this year must be completed before turning to this topic. On a related note, Professor Trapani asked if the college is considering expanding the ways in which faculty members’ scholarly accomplishment and productivity is evaluated. As an example, he noted that, when serving as an external reviewer for a tenure case at another institution recently, he had learned about Boyer’s model of scholarship. According to Ernest Boyer, who introduced the model in 1990, the ways in which research is defined should be broadened, with the goal of creating more flexibility. Under this approach, scholarship and research are divided into the following four categories: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application (also later called the scholarship of engagement), and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Provost Epstein said that she is not familiar with Boyer’s model, but finding ways to be more flexible during this time has been on her mind, she said. The provost informed the members that she has been impressed with the ways in which the University of Massachusetts has been thinking about possible changes in procedures and practices that recognize the impact of COVID-19 on faculty, including in the realm of faculty evaluation, that could provide more equitable support for colleagues. The provost said that she would be providing materials from UMass, with the goal of informing the committee’s consideration of this issue. The hope is to discuss Professor Hicks’s letter in the context of this conversation. The members then turned to personnel matters.

Following that discussion, the committee reviewed drafts of the letters that the provost sends annually to candidates and chairs regarding tenure procedures; some minor revisions to these documents were suggested. The committee recommended that ways of streamlining this document be considered, and the provost agreed to have her office reimagine the letter, which has been used for decades (with updates from the Committee of Six added each year). She noted that, in addition to sending candidates, chairs, and academic coordinator (ADC)s two letters, one geared toward candidates and the other toward chairs, which currently quote liberally from the *Faculty Handbook*, the provost’s office has developed a series of concise documents that focus on procedures and logistics (e.g., a checklist for candidates, guidelines for the submission of materials, and a timeline for departments and candidates). All such documents [are posted on the provost and dean of the faculty’s website](#). In addition, members of the provost’s office meet with candidates and chairs and ADCs (separately) each year to review all material and to answer questions, Provost Epstein noted.

The meeting concluded with a brief conversation about the charge for an ad hoc committee that will examine issues surrounding teaching effectiveness at the college, with a focus on tenure-track colleagues. The members’ review of a draft charge provided by the provost’s office as a starting point for discussion prompted a conversation about the purpose and goals of the envisioned ad hoc committee. The provost said that it is her understanding that the ad hoc committee would be charged with assessing the scope and methods of evaluating teaching at the college, including the interpretation of student evaluations. She believes that it would be helpful if the body considers whether any or all of the current methods should be retained, revised, or discontinued, and whether new systems for assessment and/or measures of teaching effectiveness should be adopted. She also imagines that the body would examine ways to mitigate bias in the assessment and evaluation process. Provost Epstein said that recommending ways to standardize procedures and practices across academic departments and programs would also be useful.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Manion said that she thought that the idea of constituting such an ad hoc committee had been an outgrowth of the college's anti-racism plan (announced in August of 2020). She feels that the focus of the committee should be on the mitigation of racial and gender bias in the assessment of teaching effectiveness. While all agreed that doing so is very important and should be part of the charge, most members felt that the ad hoc committee should address other issues as well. Professor Kingston, who chaired the ad hoc committee that developed the common teaching evaluation form, said that the charge of that body had been narrowly defined, focusing only on that project. The committee had paid considerable attention to designing questions to try to mitigate bias, he noted. Requiring students to sign evaluations, rather than submit them anonymously, is also important in this regard, he believes. Professor Trapani, who also served on the ad hoc committee, noted that, while that body had tried to mitigate bias as part of the overhaul of the student evaluation form, given that the form continues to serve as the core reference for the assessment of teaching effectiveness—which is a central component of the evaluation of faculty for reappointment and tenure—a more comprehensive view of the administration and interpretation of the form, as well as other ways in which to assess teaching beyond student reflection, is warranted, in his view. Professor Leise suggested that, in regard to the work of the ad hoc committee, perhaps there should be less emphasis on the evaluation of teaching and more attention given to developing ways to ensure excellent teaching at the college, which includes review and assessment as a component. At the conclusion of the discussion, it was agreed that Professor Kingston would draft a charge for the committee to consider, based on the members' views, and drawing on the initial charge that had been shared. The committee would then discuss the draft charge at a future meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty