

The twenty-eighth 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 22, 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 Provost Epstein informing the committee that a member is needed to serve on the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CODEI); Professor del Moral, who has been serving as the liaison to the committee from the Committee of Six, has rotated off the CODEI, the provost noted. Professor Trapani agreed to serve on the CODEI during this semester, at the end of which he will rotate off the Committee of Six.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Trapani commented on how much he had enjoyed the Rapaport Lecture on February 18, which was delivered this year by jazz pianist, composer, and visual artist Jason Moran and hosted by Professor Sonya Clark. He asked whether there are plans to post a recording of the lecture. Provost Epstein responded that a recording will be posted by the Office of Communications in the coming days.

Continuing with questions, Professor Manion informed the committee that a group of associate professors is planning to send a letter to the Committee of Six, requesting a meeting. Professor Kingston next asked how faculty members who will be serving on the Bias Education Response Team will be chosen. Provost Epstein responded that Professor Hart, in his role as a faculty equity and inclusion officer, is chairing the team, and that Professor Hayashi is serving as the other faculty member. In the future, the Committee of Six will nominate the faculty members who serve on the team, the provost said.

Professor Kingston, asked if there is information posted on the college website about protocols for faculty members who are teaching on campus. He had looked and could not find any guidance. Provost Epstein said that both instructors and students must wear masks, and that instructors must work to ensure that social distancing is maintained in the classroom and in office hours and other small group meetings with students. There are no special guidelines for faculty members who are teaching in person, she noted.

Continuing with questions, Professor Umphrey asked what the next steps will be after Susan Pierce, the outside consultant who is helping think through issues surrounding shared governance at the college, completes her interviews with some faculty members and staff. Provost Epstein responded that plans call for Ms. Pierce to meet with the Committee of Six about how best to move the process forward following this initial stage of her work.

Professor del Moral next asked whether faculty and staff have been providing personal demographic information, in response to the college’s invitation to do so. She wonders whether any reminders have been sent about this process. Provost Epstein said that she would speak with Norm Jones, chief equity and inclusion officer, about the status of this project and plans going forward. The members then turned to personnel matters.

The committee next discussed a request from Professors Basu and Polk, co-chairs of The Faculty Leadership Committee for the Anti-Racism Plan, to discuss [the faculty committee’s proposal](#). The members expressed support for having a committee-of-the whole conversation about the proposal at a faculty meeting on March 2. It was agreed that it would be helpful to discuss the proposal and for the faculty to provide feedback. Provost Epstein noted that members of the faculty committee recently discussed the proposal with the chairs of academic departments and programs and would soon discuss it with the staff in the provost’s division.

Discussion turned to proposals from the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) for [an academic calendar](#) and [course schedule](#) for the 2021–2022 academic year. Prior to the meeting, the committee was provided with [a letter from Professor Melillo, chair of the CEP, about the proposals](#), and [two related memos from Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, and Addy Free, the registrar](#).

It was noted that a salient feature of the proposed calendar included starting the fall semester on Wednesday, September 1, rather than on the Tuesday following Labor Day. The provost explained that this change from traditional practice would allow the fall semester to end on December 17. She noted that starting the semester any later would pose challenges at the end of the semester, since exams would conclude very close to the holidays, creating difficulty for some students who wished to travel home. When Labor Day falls later in September, as it will this fall (September 6), this has often been the challenge, the provost said. The proposed calendar also included a January term that would run from January 3 to January 26, which represented fifteen instructional days (the January term this year had sixteen instructional days) and a two-day evaluation period.

Under the proposal, the second semester would begin on February 3, providing a short break between the end of January term and the start of the spring semester. Under the proposal, the number of make-up days was reduced from three to one to create the break. It was noted that spring break would take place between March 14 and March 18. The members commented that, in his letter, Professor Melillo wrote that a member of the CEP had expressed some concern that, under the proposal, spring break would be too early in the term, leaving seven-and-a-half weeks between the end of spring break and the end of classes. The CEP had felt that scheduling Amherst's spring break earlier would likely create the even greater problem of being out of sync with the University of Massachusetts and the rest of the Five-College Consortium, presenting problems for some students and faculty.

The committee raised a number of questions. A member wondered why Amherst doesn't simply adopt the UMass calendar, since the colleges are essentially being held hostage to the university's calendar. Provost Epstein explained that the university starts its spring semester right after Martin Luther King Day. Under such a schedule, Amherst's January term would be truncated, which is clearly not desirable. Some members wondered why the semester could not start on a Monday instead of a Wednesday, which would mean including the last two days of August as a result. It was noted that, at the end of August, most faculty are already advising students, and the academic year has effectively begun. Provost Epstein said that the CEP had been wary of breaching September 1, but she would be happy to bring this idea forward. One member suggested that, rather than beginning the semester on a Wednesday and having a short week during the first week of classes, perhaps the Thanksgiving break week could be shortened to two days, and the fall semester could then start on the following Monday, rather than on a Wednesday. Provost Epstein said that taking this approach would mean that some students who live outside the Northeast would likely not be able to travel home for Thanksgiving. The member also wondered why Amherst's proposed calendar did not include a holiday on Indigenous Peoples' Day (October 11), as UMass's calendar does. Amherst's mid-semester break occurs the previous week on Monday and Tuesday (October 4 and 5), under the proposal, and it was suggested that, perhaps, it should be moved to the next week so that the Monday of the break is Indigenous Peoples' Day. Some concern was also raised about reducing the number of instructional days for January term. The provost noted that it would be possible to exchange one of the make-up days or evaluation days for a sixteenth day of instruction in January. She thanked the members for their feedback and said that she would consult with J. Barba about the committee's ideas.

Discussion turned to the CEP's proposal for a course schedule for the next academic year. It was noted that a decision about the schedule is needed soon, due to departmental planning needs and to inform the next round of pre-registration. A member asked why the proposal calls for adding time blocks in the early evening. Provost Epstein responded that, if there is a need for social distancing in the fall, which is not unlikely, or the spring as well, classroom capacity will continue to be reduced. It could be necessary to have courses taught during additional blocks to keep enrollment numbers lower than would be typical and to minimize co-curricular conflicts for students. The need for smaller classes would also reduce the availability of classrooms that are suitable for particular pedagogical needs. Under the proposal, faculty who want to schedule class meetings beyond 4:00 P.M. would be encouraged to do so for courses with multiple sections, with the intention that one or more sections would meet during an earlier block as well. A member asked what the impact of the proposed schedule would be on student-athletes. Provost Epstein said that she has consulted with Don Faulstick, director of athletics about this question. He has said that athletics could make the proposed schedule work, as long as dining hours are extended. It was noted that there would be budget implications under this approach, and President Martin asked the provost to consult with Kevin Weinman, chief financial and administrative officer, on this point; she agreed to do so. Some members commented that, in their experience, many student-athletes would not take courses after 2:00 P.M., even under the traditional course schedule. They worried that, under the proposed schedule, student-athletes might limit their curricular choices even further, in order to preserve time for activities related to athletics. Provost Epstein noted that it would be ideal if large introductory courses, for example, were offered in multiple sections both early and late in the day. There would then be the possibility that student-athletes could enroll in the section that met earlier, leaving time after 4:00 P.M. for athletics. A member suggested that it might be helpful to reserve some slots for student-athletes earlier in the day. Discouraging this approach, other

members expressed the view that privileging student-athletes in this way would lead to inequities at a number of levels.

The members noted that, under the proposal, the time between classes has been reduced from twenty minutes to ten. Provost Epstein commented that, if twenty minutes are allotted, time slots would definitely need to be extended past 4:00 P.M. A member asked what the consequences might be of deciding to retain the traditional schedule, in which classes are not taught after 4:00 P.M. Provost Epstein said that the proposed schedule will offer the greatest flexibility and is workable under multiple COVID-related scenarios. If social distancing is required during the next academic year, and the college keeps the traditional schedule, there will not be a sufficient number of appropriate classrooms. The proposed schedule allows for flexibility for social distancing, without compromising much, the provost noted. It was agreed that the wisest course is to prepare for all contingencies, particularly in light of predictions that “herd immunity” will not be achieved before next January, and that even that timeline is far from certain. The committee wondered how the college will ensure that classes are spread across all time blocks, which will be necessary for the proposed schedule to be effective. Provost Epstein said that departments will be strongly encouraged to do so. Provost Epstein noted that the “course bunching,” particularly in the humanities, continues to be a problem. As a result, students have fewer curricular choices, and, in her view, enrollments in humanities courses would improve if they were offered during a greater range of time slots. One member asked if it would be possible to create a mid-morning time slot that would enable courses to be taught on a Monday/Wednesday schedule. Provost Epstein said that it is her understanding that this would not be a viable option because such a schedule would overlap with the Monday/Wednesday/Friday schedule from 10:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M. to noon, which is essential to maintain for a significant number of STEM and language courses.

Discussion returned to the Jeffrey B. Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize. President Martin first noted that she has just learned that the book that Professor Ferguson had been completing in the last months of his life will be published in March, with an introduction by historian David Blight. It is her hope to mark this occasion at the college in some way. In regard to the prize named in Professor Ferguson’s honor, the committee agreed to expand the eligibility requirements and to offer some clarification about the criteria that will be used to select recipients. It was agreed that those who receive the award will have demonstrated excellence and accomplishment in all or some of the following areas: teaching, broadly; pedagogical and curricular innovation and impact, in particular; and advising. In addition, in regard to contributions to the curriculum, the strongest nominees will have had an impact in their department or program and on the broader college curriculum. Those making nominations will be asked to describe the ways in which a faculty member has excelled in these and other areas. It was agreed that all current tenured faculty, senior lecturers, and senior resident artists will be eligible for the award, and that all current faculty, all current students, and all alumni of the college will be invited to make nominations. The strongest nominees will be those who receive nominations from multiple constituencies, and multiple individuals within each constituency. One prize, which will carry a \$10,000 award, will be given annually. Those who receive the funds may choose to receive the award as compensation, in which case they will be taxable, or as college funding that can be used to support activities surrounding teaching, scholarship, and professional development—or as a combination of these forms of support.

Provost Epstein next asked the members for their thoughts about the possibility of focusing on developing a proposal this spring to clarify the criteria for tenure ([Faculty Handbook, III., E., 3. and 4.](#)) at the college. Prior to the meeting, the committee had been provided with background information about work done by past Committee of Six members to develop such a proposal during 2017–2018 and 2018–2019. The members decided that the committee should review the language of the tenure criteria, with the goal of enhancing clarity as much as possible. The emphasis of this work will focus on codifying current standards and policy, rather than developing new policies and expectations, it was agreed.

Discussion turned to [a letter sent to the members by Professor Hicks](#), in which she stressed the importance of the college taking additional steps to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on untenured faculty at Amherst, including making accommodations surrounding expectations and standards for tenure. Professor Hicks also commented on the undue impact on faculty from underrepresented groups and raised concerns surrounding

tenure equity. She called for a discussion by the full faculty of these issues. The members expressed appreciation to Professor Hicks for sharing these views, recognizing the challenges that many tenure-track colleagues are facing, and the high level of concern that many have about the tenure process.

Professor Kingston commented that Amherst has already taken some significant steps to support tenure-track faculty during the pandemic, including providing the option to delay tenure clocks by a year, and should continue to think systematically about the most viable and effective ways to address the impact of the pandemic as it unfolds. Professor Manion said that she found Professor Hicks's request that a faculty-wide standard be adopted as to which metrics and criteria are used to assess reappointment and tenure, and that these standards be clearly articulated, compelling. Professor Manion expressed the view that it would be useful to provide more transparency surrounding, for example, the attributes of a strong tenure case, and the relative importance of factors that are considered as part of the evaluation process for reappointment and tenure. Professor Kingston commented that, while he appreciates the desire to have more clarity and transparency, it is equally important, in his view, that the college continue to have a holistic tenure process. Making standards more explicit can be a double-edged sword, as doing so has the potential to make standards narrower and more rigid, and to impinge on the ability to be flexible. Faculty who have pursued non-traditional paths or work in non-traditional fields might be disadvantaged in the process, he believes. President Martin commented on the important role that departments should play in making the expectations for tenure in their fields clear to their tenure-track faculty, as these expectations differ by field, including what will constitute a strong case for tenure.

Professor Leise commented on the importance of the conversations that are under way. She asked the provost whether expectations of accomplishment are raised if a tenure candidate has an extended tenure clock. Provost Epstein said that the number of years in rank does not affect expectations surrounding the rate of a candidate's progress and accomplishment. Professor Trapani commented that the anxiety of untenured faculty would be reduced if this fact was made more explicit and that it would be important for departments to convey this to external reviewers at the time of tenure. At the conclusion of the discussion, Professor Umphrey suggested that it could be helpful, in a year or so, to form an ad hoc group to gather data on the impact of the pandemic on scholarly productivity at Amherst and within academia more broadly. She suspects that professional organizations may be amassing this information already. Provost Epstein viewed this as a sound idea. Some other members concurred.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty