

The second 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, July 13, 2020. 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.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Martin noted that, thus far, 1,060 Amherst students who were invited to return to campus in the fall have indicated that they plan to do so—about two hundred students short of the number that the college had expected. Amherst may consider some additional petitions from students who want to come to campus and meet a number of criteria, she noted. President Martin informed the members that the deadline for students to make their intentions known is 5:00 P.M. today. About 8.5 percent of students have now requested to take a gap year or academic leave, confirming what the same proportion had indicated previously, when completing surveys. The president noted that, in the days to come, she and the senior staff will review carefully data about students’ decisions, making plans accordingly.

Conversation turned to the topic of anti-bias training. President Martin and Provost Epstein emphasized that it is a college priority that all staff and students participate in anti-bias training. They asked the members for their thoughts about the form that such training should take for the faculty. The committee agreed that anti-bias training is critical for faculty. Professor Leise suggested that the college offer opportunities for faculty and staff to attend anti-bias workshops and other forms of training together. Professor Kingston concurred, commenting that having different campus constituencies participate in training separately seems antithetical to the goal of fostering an inclusive community at Amherst. The members also expressed a preference for training that is created in-house, rather than making use of online training modules provided by an outside vendor. Provost Epstein commented that, in the past, relatively few faculty members have attended workshops on issues surrounding race and racism that have been offered by the Offices of Diversity and Inclusion (now known as the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and Human Resources. Some members suggested that anti-bias training be treated in the same way as Title IX training, which is a requirement for all faculty and staff. President Martin and Provost Epstein expressed support for having faculty and staff engage in anti-bias training together, if that approach is preferred.

In regard to the question of whether anti-bias training should be mandatory for faculty, Professor Trapani expressed support for having such a requirement, thus ensuring that everyone makes time for this important work. If the college can require cybersecurity training for faculty, it can require anti-bias training, in his view. The other members concurred. Professor Trapani also suggested that the ways in which training opportunities are communicated should become more varied and prominent, helping to make sure that faculty and staff are aware when workshops are being held. Professor Umphrey asked if there are ways to make use of a community hour to engage in training and other educational opportunities surrounding race and racism. Provost Epstein explained that classroom shortages made it impossible to build a community hour into this year’s academic calendar. Moreover, the hour that has been envisioned for co-curricular activities would only be an hour in duration, which would not provide sufficient time to conduct training, the provost said. It might be possible to create a community hour if the college needs to transition to all-remote teaching in the fall, she noted, and some of this time could then be used for programming surrounding race and racism and other topics.

Professor Manion stressed the necessity of having all faculty participate in the training, and she agreed that this should be a requirement. Faculty, in their role as educators, need to understand students’ experiences of racism and racial violence. She noted that, while resistance to mandatory training is often framed as an issue of academic freedom, we might look at it differently. If students think we don’t care enough about racism even to learn the terminology, arguments, and demands of the movement for Black lives, how will we be able to teach and mentor them effectively? Departments need to discuss the ways in which issues surrounding race and racism resonate within disciplines, she

noted. In her view, if a baseline of 10 to 20 percent of the faculty gains knowledge and compassion about racism, it will be worth any resistance to making training a requirement.

Professor Trapani agreed that it would be helpful to have training surrounding curriculum development, with a focus on issues of race and racism, take place within departments; to have the faculty equity and inclusion officer (FEIO)s offer training across academic departments; and also to have faculty participate in college-wide training with staff and students, which will help to build community. Provost Epstein noted that last year's Committee of Six had emphasized that faculty members in all disciplines need to feel comfortable having open and robust conversations in their classrooms about race and racism. Professors Schmalzbauer, Basu, and Sims had agreed to work with the FEIOs to develop and facilitate some workshops, and then to invite all members of the faculty to participate. Recommending readings and best practices was also seen as important, she noted. President Martin encouraged departments and faculty groups to spend time reading and discussing some of the extraordinary long-form essays on issues of race and racism, in addition to participating in formal anti-bias training that is developed. Professor Trapani expressed support for doing so and noted how much he had learned from the recent [online discussion between Nikole Hannah-Jones and Professor Polk about the legacy of slavery in the United States](#), applauding the college for offering this programming. President Martin informed the members that more discussions of this kind are being planned with guest-speakers.

Continuing the conversation, Professor del Moral suggested that the ways in which the college is supporting the faculty's transition to remote teaching offers an excellent model for the work ahead surrounding anti-racism. She has found the efforts of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and Academic Technology Services (ATS) to profile online some Amherst faculty members' pedagogical approaches to be very helpful. This structure has helped faculty members to educate one another about strategies for remote teaching, Professor del Moral commented. In addition, Professor del Moral wonders if the incentives that have been offered to faculty to work on enhancing remote teaching can be replicated for anti-bias training and curricular work surrounding race and racism, which may encourage faculty to take the initiative in these areas. She suggested that, in addition, the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offer anti-racist training for faculty, drawing on models that have been successful at other institutions of higher learning, and that departments also develop their own educational opportunities. Professor del Moral cautioned against adopting a strategy that would tap faculty from underrepresented groups to testify about the pain that they have experienced personally. In her view, everyone should be educating themselves about issues surrounding bias and racism, and the faculty should be accountable for doing this work. Professor del Moral worries that if training is not required, the work will not be done.

Concluding the discussion, Professor Umphrey commented that almost all faculty have been placed in small groups to participate in the 2U and ACUE-based summer programs. She wonders if this infrastructure could be used to provide some readings and videos to faculty before the semester begins. Colleagues could be informed that the study of race and racism is a compelling field of knowledge about which they may wish to learn more, while also "meeting the moment" and students' calls for change at Amherst and the country more broadly. Perhaps, she suggested, a seventh week with this focus could be added to the summer programs, with discussions enriched by the bonds that faculty have already formed within their groups. The provost said that this approach might be possible, but that the FDEOs would need to lead such an effort, as the CTL and ATS are stretched thin.

Under her remarks, Provost Epstein noted that she had consulted with the class deans, per the committee's request, about whether they are concerned that vulnerable students may make more use of the flexible grading option (FGO) this year, in ways that may be detrimental, based on what they had observed about FGO usage last spring. The class deans said that they appreciate the flexibility shown by the faculty, and that they are hopeful that the FGO policy for this academic year will serve as a useful

resource for many students. They do not have any concerns about the use of FGOs, as they assume that students will be advised well by the faculty, in advance, on how to use FGOs strategically.

The committee noted that, at an orientation held prior to the committee's first meeting, the members had discussed issues of confidentiality in the committee's minutes. The members were informed that public minutes should be used as a guide in regard to questions of whether matters discussed by the committee can be shared with others; it was also noted that very few conversations (with the exception of personnel matters and committee nominations that are under consideration) have not been included in the committee's public minutes. Minutes of discussions of certain sensitive or unresolved matters and plans in their formative stages, about which the president and the provost are seeking the advice of the Committee of Six, have sometimes been kept confidential, the members were told. Generally, conversations about these issues are made public once the matter is in a less tentative state, the committee learned. It was agreed that email will not be used to communicate about personnel or other confidential matters, and that the use of email should be kept to a minimum in general. The longstanding policy of appending letters to the minutes was also discussed. Letter-writers are informed by the provost's office as to when their letters will be appended, it was noted. If colleagues state at the outset that they do not want the contents of a letter discussed in the public minutes, the committee will decide whether it wishes to take up the matter in question. The members then decided that, for reasons of transparency, comments by committee members should be attributed by name in the minutes.

The provost next informed the members that she and President Martin have decided to authorize seven searches for tenure-track faculty positions. It was fortuitous, she noted, that the number of requests for positions matched the number of FTEs available this year, a rarity, in her experience. Positions were allocated in the following areas and departments: organic chemistry (chemistry), South Asian history (a joint appointment in history and Asian languages and civilizations), gender and science (sexuality, women's and gender studies), sculpture (art and the history of art), Asian American history (a joint appointment in history and sexuality, women's and gender studies), political theory (political science), and race and politics (political science; the department's search in this area last year failed). President Martin commented that the decision to authorize the searches was made recently, after she, the provost, and the chief financial and administrative officer had spent some time weighing the pressures on the budget. The trustees supported the decision to move forward, she noted. In the president's view, during a crisis, it is important to be both prudent and cautious in regard to expending resources, while also seizing opportunities. She noted that most institutions have put hiring freezes in place at this time, presenting a golden opportunity for Amherst to hire stellar new faculty in a range of disciplines. At the same time, making a commitment to these additional faculty salaries—when every source of the college's revenue is under pressure—was done only after a good deal of assessment, she said.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Kingston asked how many of the allocated FTEs are replacements, and to what degree there is an overarching strategy for allocating new FTEs. Provost Epstein responded that most of the recently allocated FTEs are for replacements. More broadly, she explained that an important goal of the ongoing comprehensive campaign is to expand the faculty—with funds being raised to support twelve additional professorships. As an example of current priorities, she noted that the position in chemistry is new and is part of an effort to expand the faculty in STEM fields. Another priority is to continue to diversify the faculty. In addition to adding positions in STEM, the college also hopes to expand positions in areas that will enable more students to study their own history and cultures, and those of others. Provost Epstein said that many departments want to expand into new curricular areas, but at the same time, do not want to give up areas that they have now. This structural problem can lead to some challenging conversations surrounding FTEs, she noted.

President Martin commented that, due to its other work, it is challenging for the Committee on Educational Policy to find time to consider the future of the curriculum some ten or twenty years out. It is critical that the college do so, however, she said. It is important that the faculty consider questions such as interdisciplinary areas on which there should be a greater focus, and, more generally, whether the college is moving forward in ways that both provide students with the best liberal arts education, and advance knowledge. The president does not envision being able to add many more lines beyond the twelve that are being planned; departmental needs and college-wide needs must be weighed with care, she noted. While enrollments should not be determinative, they need to be taken into account, President Martin commented.

Returning to her remarks, Provost Epstein informed the committee of plans to hold a virtual convocation on August 23—a ceremony that will need to be modified for this format—and a virtual faculty meeting on September 1. The faculty will need to vote on course proposals electronically in mid-August, she explained. The members agreed that a faculty meeting should be held on September 1. The agenda for that meeting will be approved at a future Committee of Six meeting, it was noted.

Under “Questions from committee members,” Professor Kingston asked, on behalf of a colleague, when Woodside Children’s Center will reopen. Provost Epstein commented that there was not sufficient interest to warrant keeping the center open during the entire summer; the plan is to reopen on August 17. Professor Trapani noted that Woodside families, his included, had received an email from the center about a meeting that would take place that evening about the facility’s plans, as well as a fall enrollment form. It is his understanding that the director and assistant director will answer questions at that time.

Professor Umphrey next asked, on behalf of a colleague, about the status of work to develop a bias-reporting and response protocol. The president responded that things are moving forward on two interrelated fronts—a change to the honor code that will be policy driven and which will focus on harassment and discrimination, and the development of a bias-reporting and response protocol. Laurie Frankl, Title IX coordinator, and Dean Gendron, senior associate dean of students, are continuing their work on the former, she noted. She has made a commitment to students that both efforts will be ready for review in the fall, President Martin said, and she expects a recommendation from the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion by the end of the summer. The president reiterated the importance of pairing the launch of the bias-reporting and response protocol with the implementation of RPAC (Restorative Practices at Amherst College). Professor Umphrey asked if these efforts will focus on student-to-student incidents only. President Martin explained that the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion had been in conversation with the previous Committee of Six about a bias-reporting and response protocol that would apply to faculty and staff as well. The goal is to develop a community-wide process, the president said. Provost Epstein noted the intersection of issues surrounding academic freedom that have been raised in regard to bias reporting in a classroom setting. President Martin noted that the University of Chicago, which has a robust statement on academic freedom, also has a bias-reporting and response protocol, on which Amherst’s own can be modeled.

Continuing with questions, Professor Trapani noted that, in response to the Committee of Six minutes of June 8, 2020, a number of tenure-track faculty members have written to him to convey concerns. He explained that, [in a note that he had written to the previous Committee of Six](#), which had been attached to those minutes, he had noted that, while faculty had previously been told to prioritize teaching over research because of the additional preparation for teaching that is now required due to the pandemic, the minutes conveyed a different expectation—that teaching *not* be prioritized over research. A number of tenure-track faculty are now worried that, at the time of tenure, all that they have been asked to do on the teaching front during the pandemic—efforts (including the 2U and ACUE summer programs) that are peripheral to their research and actually take up time that they would otherwise devote to research—will not be considered in the context of their

scholarly productivity at the time of tenure. Professor Trapani noted that the minutes suggested that faculty should be focusing on research and scholarship.

Responding, Provost Epstein commented that, while the college had, early on, asked faculty to prioritize teaching over research, the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Academic Structures During COVID-19 (ASC) later recommended a different approach. The ASC had decided, as noted in the June 8 minutes, that it would be “misleading to suggest that the college’s standards in regard to scholarly accomplishment at the time of the review for tenure will change. Instead, the ASC made recommendations (course reduction, allowing faculty to co-teach and have senior faculty carry the bulk of the responsibility for a course, reducing the number of advisees) that aim to lighten tenure-track faculty members’ teaching load so as to preserve time for them to do research.” Professor Trapani expressed the view that these ideas and accommodations—for example having tenured colleagues teach an overload to enable untenured colleagues to have a reduced teaching load—might seem helpful “on paper,” but would not necessarily be workable in reality. Some untenured faculty share this view, he noted, and worry about how they will be evaluated at the time of tenure. Provost Epstein informed the committee that she had emailed all faculty members who had filled out the form to request a change in their teaching load and had offered to discuss any concerns. If colleagues did not fill out the form or communicate with her in other ways, she had no way of knowing that they needed a reduced teaching burden, she noted. In addition, tenure-track faculty members and their departments will have the opportunity to discuss the impact of the pandemic on candidates’ teaching and research at the time of the reappointment and tenure reviews, the provost said.

Turning to another topic, Provost Epstein noted that the college has decided to capitalize *Black*, [when, as the New York Times recently noted](#), “describing people and cultures of African origin.” The provost explained that the newspaper has also made this change, commenting recently that it “...believe[s] this style best conveys elements of shared history and identity, and reflects our goal to be respectful of all the people and communities we cover.” The Committee of Six expressed support for adopting this change in its minutes.

The members then briefly discussed efforts to identify and recruit faculty of color, with President Martin and Provost Epstein urging departments to apply for one of the five additional FTE lines that the board of trustees had allocated, and for which departments had been invited to apply in 2016, to enhance the recruitment of Black and Latinx scholars. Three of these FTEs are still available. They also noted that a target-of-opportunity process is available under a separate process—as part of the regular search process—for tenure-track faculty. While some additional efforts may be needed to identify talented scholars of color, particularly in certain disciplines, this work is important and needs to be undertaken, the committee agreed. Professor del Moral emphasized that there are scholars of color who meet and exceed Amherst’s criteria for tenure, but departments must be willing to take the additional steps that are necessary to recruit them.

On behalf of several colleagues, Professor Manion next asked about the college’s response to the Trump administration’s newly announced policy directive requiring international students to take at least some in-person courses in order to remain in the United States. President Martin said that Amherst will do everything it can to protect international students and to advocate for them. She noted that Amherst is among the many other colleges and universities that have joined together to file amicus briefs in support of a lawsuit filed by Harvard and MIT. (The government later agreed to rescind the policy guidance.)

Provost Epstein next discussed with the members the college’s new [Statement of Shared Responsibility in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). She informed the committee that Amherst students, faculty, and staff will be required to abide by the statement, and that it will be added to the *Faculty Handbook*, the *Student Code of Conduct*, and the *Employee Handbook*. Professor Leise said that she is not clear about the difference in meaning between “removed” and “trespassed,” as these terms

are used in the statement. The provost explained that *trespassed* represents an extra-legal step that means that, if the individual comes back on campus, the person can be arrested. *Removed* means that individuals are told to leave campus. The committee expressed support for moving forward with the statement.

Professor Manion next inquired whether an alternative could be provided to the current policy on the COVID-19 website that requires faculty and staff to report a positive COVID-19 test result to John Carter, Amherst's chief of police and director of public safety. Noting nationwide police violence against Black people and ongoing protests, she wonders if the college could put a system in place that centers the needs of Black and brown people in the Amherst community. She asked whether professionals in the field of public health might take on this responsibility, as testing ramps up in the late-summer and fall, and contact tracing is required for those who test positive for COVID-19. President Martin, praising Chief Carter for the work he has done in the area of contact tracing last spring and this summer, said that it is her understanding that Kevin Weinman, chief financial administrative officer, is now assembling a contact-tracing team, and that John Carter will no longer be involved in this work. She said she would provide more information to the committee about the contact-tracing team as she learns more. Amherst's health center cannot do this work for faculty and staff because of insurance issues. The meeting concluded with a discussion about a committee nomination.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty