

The first meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2020–2021 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 10:30 A.M. on Thursday, July 2, 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.

The president and provost welcomed the members to the committee and thanked them for meeting during the summer, a schedule that is atypical for the Committee of Six. In this regard, Provost Epstein commented on the importance of having regular opportunities for consultation with the committee during this time of flux and uncertainty, as the pandemic continues to unfold.

Under “Topics of the day,” President Martin and Provost Epstein noted that they will host a number of virtual meetings—two for students and their families and one for staff—to provide information and answer questions about the college’s plans for fall 2020, which [the president had announced on July 1](#).

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Manion followed up on a question that she had asked at the special meeting of the faculty held on June 30. A colleague had asked Professor Manion to inquire once again how the college would respond if a member of the Amherst community refuses to wear a mask while on campus. President Martin replied that all faculty, students, and staff are required to wear masks in public spaces on campus and, later this summer, will be asked to sign an agreement to this effect. Anyone violating this policy, which will be posted in all college buildings, will be asked to stay away from campus, she said. Professor Trapani asked what the protocol will be if someone observes that an individual is not wearing a mask. In particular, he is concerned that, if students see a faculty member not wearing a mask, they may not feel comfortable reporting what they have observed, and may be concerned about ensuring their anonymity if they do. President Martin said that she would ensure that all members of the community are provided with guidance about what to do in this situation.

Professor Umphrey, who had observed at the June 30 faculty meeting that some comments about possible responses to student infractions had moved quickly toward the idea of punishment, said she hopes that an educational approach would be Amherst’s first recourse. Such an approach, she imagines, would stress the need to respect the general good, and address feelings of fear and anxiety during this time. President Martin said that, as noted at the faculty meeting, the response to an initial and relatively minor infraction would result in an approach much like what Professor Umphrey had described. The president commented that it is hoped that the college can make use of the more robust restorative practices that are beginning to be adopted on campus, and she noted that students will also educate one another. Repeated infractions, or one that is serious enough to put people at high risk, would have consequences, however. President Martin commented that the members of the student advisory committee with whom she has been consulting—aware of the liberties that students have taken in the past that put others at risk—have requested that Amherst adopt a model of accountability and consequences when students return to campus. The college supports this approach, given the seriousness of the COVID-19 situation, the president said, and those who disregard policies may be asked to leave campus—going either to nearby spaces that the college has secured, or back to their homes, depending on the situation. Students who are asked to leave campus will still be enrolled and may study remotely.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Trapani stressed the importance of ensuring that students are provided with information and training about the virus and how it is spread, as part of Amherst’s educational role. Some students, he noted, may come from areas and/or families in which the risks of the virus are not understood or believed. President Martin said that the college will educate students about the virus, both before they arrive on campus and after they are here.

Professor del Moral inquired about the status of the five additional FTE lines that the board of trustees allocated in 2016, at the request of the president, to enhance the recruitment of Black and Latinx scholars. She also asked about the process that departments must use to apply for these FTEs.

Provost Epstein responded that two of these lines have been allocated so far, and that the college is eager to allocate the other three. Both the president and the provost encouraged departments to apply for these positions. Departments that would like to bring forward a request to hire a specific individual must submit a proposal to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP). Prior to doing so, the provost recommended that departments speak with her about the individual whom they wish to hire. Included in the proposal is a brief summary of the process that led to the identification and recruitment of the individual and a description of the strengths in scholarship, teaching, and service that the person promises to bring to the department and the college, including contributions to the curriculum. The scholar's CV is also provided. It is imperative that these FTEs be hired through specific, targeted outreach and recruitment, Provost Epstein noted. An FTE that is allocated through this program will be "on loan" to the department, she explained. When a faculty member who is hired into one of these positions retires, the line will return to the college. Lines that are allocated through this program do not require that departments "mortgage" another FTE.

Professor del Moral next asked that the faculty be provided with the number of tenured faculty who are persons of color, and that this number be broken out by identity groups (Black, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American), and their departments. She also requested data about the number of tenure-track faculty who are persons of color and their departments. The members agreed that having baseline information of this kind will be helpful as the college moves forward with recruitment efforts. Provost Epstein agreed, while expressing concern about providing information at the department level. Given the small number of faculty in each department, those colleagues who have not disclosed their racial and/or ethnic identity possibly could be identified if such data were to become public. The provost noted that, at present, statistics indicate that the college has fewer faculty of color than it actually does, given that some faculty from underrepresented groups and some white faculty choose not to self-identify. Professor Kingston commented that some inaccurate or misleading information has been circulating, and that, if the administration does not provide correct information, the vacuum may be filled with misinformation.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Manion concurred that information at the department level is needed. She commented that, while the instinct is often to protect underrepresented groups by not counting individuals—and that instinct is admirable in her view—having accurate information is essential, in order to hold institutions accountable. Data that are collected with the goal of supporting underrepresented groups should be encouraged, Professor Manion pointed out. In relation to the provost's concern about revealing the identities of those who have chosen not to self-disclose, the members asked when faculty are asked to disclose their racial and/or ethnic identity. The provost responded that this step occurs at the time of hiring. Several members noted that, while they may not have provided information at that time, perhaps they would be willing to do so now, given the current moment and their awareness of the importance of this information. Others may feel the same way, they suspect. President Martin suggested that faculty be given the opportunity to self-disclose now if they wish to do so, with the understanding that they would be doing so for a valuable purpose. Provost Epstein expressed enthusiasm for finding a way to obtain this information. The Committee of Six agreed to lead efforts to gather these data, in order to measure the progress Amherst is making in diversifying the faculty.

President Martin suggested that faculty also be asked to self-disclose whether they are LGBTQ if they wish to do so. She believes that many LGBTQ colleagues would be pleased to be asked to do so. Professor Umphrey agreed that this effort is important for "meeting the moment," including engaging with issues about which students are most concerned. She suggested that Professor Hart, faculty diversity and inclusion officer, be consulted about ways to frame this request in ways that resonate with colleagues. The other members expressed support for this idea. The provost agreed to consult with Professor Hart. Professor Manion commented that there is a body of scholarship that focuses on capturing this information (e.g., for the census) and suggested that it would be informative to invite a scholar in this field

to speak at Amherst about this subject. Issues surrounding gathering these data have been a fundamental part of how race and racism function, Professor Manion noted. At the conclusion of the conversation, the members agreed to think further about how to gather information about the number of tenure-line faculty of color at Amherst, and LGBTQ faculty, and to move forward with doing so late this summer or early in the fall. Professor Kingston suggested that it would also be informative and helpful to examine tenure statistics to determine the tenure rate for faculty of color and how it compares to the tenure rate for other faculty. He noted that a lack of clear information on this topic may be producing anxiety for underrepresented tenure-track faculty.

The committee briefly discussed the new Instagram page, [@Blackamherstspeaks](#), which was also the subject of conversation at the June 29 meeting of the outgoing Committee of Six. The new Committee of Six, like the outgoing committee, supported sharing with the Amherst community more broadly the experiences of racism and harassment that Amherst students and alumni of color are recounting in their posts. President Martin expressed the view that many faculty members may not be aware of the Instagram account and suggested that the posts also be made available in another format, so they will be read more widely. The president noted that she has sent an institutional response to the creators of the Instagram account and that it had been posted on Instagram the previous evening. President Martin informed the members that the college has already taken steps to address some issues and incidents described in some of the posts and will work to address others that present enough specifics to allow Amherst to act.

Conversation turned to a [proposal from the Committee on Educational Policy \(CEP\)](#) for a grading policy for the 2020–2021 academic year. (See also the discussion of the proposal by the outgoing Committee of Six in the June 29 Committee of Six minutes.) The provost noted that, as described in the proposal, the CEP favors a return to the college's regular grading policy for the 2020–2021 academic year, while also continuing to provide greater flexibility, given the current circumstances. She informed the members that the outgoing Committee of Six had found the CEP's ideas to be compelling and supported the proposal.

(To avoid confusion, the information below reflects the committee's decision to propose that an *additional* FGO also be provided during the January term, bringing the total number of *additional* FGOs to three. In its original proposal, the CEP had suggested extending two *additional* FGOs, one that could be used in the fall semester, and the other in the spring.)

Provost Epstein noted that, under Amherst's regular policy, students are permitted to use up to four FGOs during their time at the college; students are permitted to use only one FGO per term, and it must be elected by the end of the add-drop period. Now, in light of the pandemic, the CEP has proposed, and the Committee of Six supports, extending up to three *additional* FGOs, she said. Use of these *additional* FGOs would be limited to one course during the fall semester, January term, and spring semester of this academic year. These *additional* FGOs would not "count" against the four FGOs that all students are permitted to use during their time at the college, the provost noted. Both committees agreed that other measures already approved by the faculty for this academic year, for example the reduced course load, will also provide students with greater flexibility and support.

Continuing, Provost Epstein said that that, under the proposed grading policy, in fall 2020 and spring 2021, students would be permitted to elect one course as a regular FGO during the add-drop period, and to elect one additional course as an FGO after receiving a letter grade for their work in that course. For each of these two courses, students could then choose either to accept the letter grade or to replace the letter grade with a *pass* (if they have received a passing grade), Provost Epstein explained. In addition, students who take a course in January 2021 would be permitted to elect an FGO option in that course. There is an exception for students who are in their final semester at the college, who cannot use an FGO in that semester. Under the proposal, the provost said, such students would be allowed to select one additional course (beyond the one to which they are already entitled in their final semester)

to be taken pass/fail.

Professor Umphrey said that she supports the proposal, as she feels that it is important to return to as regular a set of expectations for students as is possible under the circumstances, while still being supportive. She noted the need to document the academic work of juniors and seniors, as many will wish to go on to graduate school. Professor Kingston concurred, commenting that there is already a good deal of flexibility and that he will be less lenient with grades in the coming semester than he was in the spring. Professor Trapani said that he wanted to confirm that, if students withdraw from a course and drop down to two courses, they would still be eligible for financial aid. Provost Epstein said that, as long as students are registered for three courses through the end of add/drop, they will be considered full-time students and will not jeopardize their qualification for federal financial aid. Professor Manion also expressed support for the proposal, including the idea that use of the *additional* FGOs would occur at the end of the semester (serving as what she described as a “crisis FGO”). Professor Trapani commented that it is theoretically possible that a student could use the current FGO policy (selecting a course during add/drop as an FGO) and then, under the proposal, have an *additional* FGO at the end of the semester, and possibly not have any grades. Professor Umphrey asked if the data about FGO usage from last spring, provided by Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, reveal any concerns, as she worries that vulnerable students may make more use of the FGO in higher numbers. Provost Epstein said that she has not heard any concerns of this kind, but that she could ask the class deans about this question and could also ask for their feedback about the proposal. The committee asked the provost to move forward with this plan.

Overall, the committee expressed support for the CEP’s proposed grading policy (with the addition of the January term FGO) and agreed that the faculty should vote on it electronically as soon as is practicable, without calling a faculty meeting. The provost said that, if the class deans do not share any concerns, she would provide a draft motion to the committee early next week.

(The committee later voted six in favor and zero opposed on content and six in favor and zero opposed to forward the following motion to the faculty:

That the Flexible Grading Option [FGO] policy be revised for the 2020–2021 academic year to extend up to three *additional* FGOs to all students, and that these *additional* FGOs, if used, be elected after grades are posted, by a date set by the registrar.

That these *additional* FGOs not count as one of the four FGOs that students are permitted to use during their time at the college, and that use of these *additional* FGOs be limited to one course during the fall semester, January term, and spring semester of this academic year [one regular FGO and one *additional* FGO may be used for fall and spring, and an *additional* FGO may be used for January term]. See the exception below for students in their final semester at the college.

That during the 2020–2021 academic year, students who have not exhausted their FGOs by the time they are in their final semester at the college be allowed to select one additional course [beyond the one to which they are already entitled in their final semester] to be taken pass/fail. [Note that students who are in their final semester at the college, in accordance with current policy, are not permitted to use an FGO in that semester].

That students who are not in their final semester at the college have until a date, to be set by the registrar for each semester and the January 2021 term, to decide whether or not to accept their assigned grade, or in the case of any passing grade, to elect to use an additional FGO to receive a *pass* ["P"] in one course).

The meeting adjourned at 11:34 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty