

The thirty-third meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2019–2020 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, June 15, 2020. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors Basu, Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with a discussion of the committee's meeting schedule for the remaining weeks of June. The incoming Committee of Six will begin meeting in early July and will continue to do so over the summer, though not on a weekly basis and with more abbreviated meetings. The committee will resume its regular schedule once classes begin. Provost Epstein said that she does not anticipate that the committee will need to meet on June 22, unless the members wish to discuss the proposed academic calendar for 2020–2021 and/or schedule for fall 2020. Plans call for the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) to consider the calendar and schedule this coming Wednesday, the provost said. The hope is that the CEP will then forward the proposed calendar and schedule to the Committee of Six, and that the committee will review them soon after. If the members have no concerns, the faculty could vote electronically, perhaps as early as this week. If the members wish to have a discussion via Zoom, the committee can do so on June 22, Provost Epstein said.

The provost next asked if the members had any concerns about the calendar, based on the proposal shared at the last faculty meeting. Professor Goutte noted that some colleagues have worried that there is such a long period without a break during the spring semester. As little as one day off could be helpful, she noted. Provost Epstein responded that, depending on how the pandemic unfolds, it might be possible to have a day without classes, or to add in a break, if senior week does not take place. She reiterated that there are no breaks included during the fall and spring because the college does not want students leaving campus and then returning soon after to resume classes, due to the risks associated with COVID-19.

The committee briefly discussed the proposed academic schedule for the fall and data about some classrooms, which the provost had shared with the faculty earlier in the day via email. Provost Epstein noted that Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, is still working with other colleagues on plans to reduce the capacity of classrooms to allow for social distancing, and that the list that had been provided is not final. Most members said that they had not had much time to digest the information fully before the meeting, but did not identify any problems based on their initial review. As an aside, the provost informed the members that she would soon be sending a communication to all students about the changes to the academic program for the coming academic year, as recommended by the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Academic Structures During COVID-19 (ASC) and approved by the faculty earlier in the month.

Continuing the conversation, some members asked whether courses will need to be reapproved by the CEP. Provost Epstein said that only new courses will require approval by the CEP. All courses that will be taught in the academic year 2020–2021, including the January term, will need to be updated in [the college's catalog editing tool](#), the provost explained. This should be done no later than June 19, she noted. For each course, there is an option to indicate that the course will be offered only online. All other courses will be assumed to be "HyFlex," that is, some or all course meetings will be in person, but also accessible to students joining the class through remote learning. She noted that courses may be divided into two sections if thirty or more students enrolled in the course in its last iteration, or if thirty or more students pre-register for the course. Professor Basu asked what the process should be if a faculty member wishes to teach a seminar remotely in two sections, since enrollments will not be known until after registration. Would the best approach be to propose teaching two sections and then to cancel one if the minimum enrollment is not met? Provost Epstein said that the best approach would be to offer two different classes; if one of them ends up having thirty or more students, the other class could be canceled and the large class could be divided into two. Otherwise, professors will not have students pre-registered for a second course. The provost also noted the following course caps: one

hundred- and two hundred-level courses may be capped at eighteen; three hundred- and four hundred-level courses may be capped at fifteen.

(The committee later reviewed the proposed calendar and schedule and, on June 18, voted unanimously in favor on the substance and to forward the following two motions to the faculty.

Motion One

As recommended by the Committee on Educational Policy and the Committee of Six, that the faculty approve [the proposed calendar for the 2020–2021 academic year](#).

Motion Two

As recommended by the Committee on Educational Policy and the Committee of Six, that the faculty approve the [proposed meeting times and time slots for classes for the fall 2020 semester.](#))

Professor Horton wondered if there might be business for the faculty to take up at a faculty meeting in the coming weeks. The provost noted that the grading policy for the next academic year will be an issue that the faculty needs to decide, but that the CEP must consider this question first. The CEP will not have time to address the grading policy this week, she noted. Professor Sims expressed the view that there should be clarity about the grading policy before the start of re-registration so that students know their options before choosing classes. She said that some faculty have expressed to her that the college should consider a universal pass/fail model as an option, in addition to thinking about whether to put in place a mandatory flexible grading option (FGO) for all or some courses. Professor Sims expressed the view that it is important to have a faculty conversation about this topic that is as inclusive as possible, noting that some faculty were troubled about the lack of a discussion about grading policy before last spring's vote on the FGO. Another option for the coming year that has been suggested to her is that all first-year students take courses pass/fail in their first semester at the college. Professor Horton suggested that no significant changes to the grading policy should be needed in the coming year, given the accommodations that are going to be made to support students, as recommended by the ASC and voted by the faculty. Provost Epstein concurred and noted that part of the rationale for having three courses as the regular course load is to help students be successful in the courses they take. Professor Sims commented that it is likely that students with underlying health problems, as well as some international students, will definitely be learning remotely, and may struggle in the same ways that students did in the spring. Provost Epstein later conveyed these concerns to the CEP.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Schmalzbauer asked for confirmation that faculty cannot use two course releases that they may have accrued for various reasons to reduce their teaching load to zero during a given semester. The provost confirmed that this is indeed the case, with some exceptions made for some half-time faculty-administrators. Professor Goutte next asked if faculty who are lecturing to a small number of students in a large room this fall will need to wear a mask or protective shield. The provost said that all faculty and students will need to wear masks if classes are taking place on campus. Professor Goutte next inquired whether, for a large class, it would be permissible to offer live recorded lectures to which half of the students in the class are invited to attend in person on one day, and the other half is invited to the next lecture. This strategy would reduce in-person class size by one-half, while ensuring that each student has access to one or two in-person lectures each week, she noted. This would be fine, Provost Epstein said, as long as students attend on the required day so as to preserve social distancing.

Continuing with questions, Professor Sims asked whether it will be possible for athletes to take a course during January term, since, typically some teams (e.g., swimming, basketball, and hockey) train intensively or have part of their season during this time period. Provost Epstein said that, depending on

how the pandemic unfolds, teams may be able to focus on training and conditioning in January. She does not think it likely that teams will be traveling to train in other locations, however. It might be possible both to train and condition and to take an intensive course during January, the provost said, depending on the requirements of both. On the other hand, given that the January term will most likely be remote, it may not be advisable to bring athletes back to campus at that time.

Noting that the committee would have only one more meeting if the members do not meet on June 22, Professor Basu suggested that that committee discuss how best to move forward with the consideration of service burdens placed on faculty, with a focus on inequities. It might be useful, she noted, to provide the incoming Committee of Six with thoughts about how to determine the extent to which service demands may be unequal and how such inequities might be addressed. The other members agreed that it would be a good idea to think further about this issue and to have a discussion at the members' next meeting.

Professor Brooks next asked President Martin if progress is being made on developing 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. It is anticipated that both efforts will be ready for review in the fall, President Martin said. She stressed the importance of pairing the launch of the bias-reporting and response protocol with the implementation of RPAC (Restorative Practices at Amherst College).

The members next discussed and approved some revisions to the provost's letters to chairs and candidates about reappointment. The changes are aimed at incorporating guidelines surrounding faculty personnel processes that are included in the report of the ASC, and options regarding teaching evaluations for the spring 2020 semester, which were granted to all tenure-track faculty. The members then reviewed a nomination for a new endowed professorship and offered their support for naming the nominee to the professorship. The next step is for President Martin to bring her recommendation to the board of trustees for approval.

The committee returned to the topic of guidelines for administering teaching evaluations for tenure-track faculty, reviewing a draft that the members had begun earlier, and which was informed by the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Development of a Common Form to Evaluate Classroom Teaching, as well as the Committee of Six's conversations with the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty and tenure-track faculty, more broadly. The members agreed to finalize the document, if possible, on June 29, which would be the committee's last meeting.

In preparation for meeting with three student-leaders of the Black Student Union (BSU) in the next hour, the members discussed some points that would be helpful to share. The committee stressed the importance of conveying to the students that, before any proposals for change within the academic realm are brought to the faculty, it would be useful and informative to have some preliminary conversations—in particular on bias-reporting and the relationship between harmful and harassing language and academic freedom—with faculty and students in small groups. In this way, intellectual exchange could take place, laying the groundwork for shaping proposals that might later be brought to the faculty. The members agreed that the relationship between harmful and harassing language and the college's [Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#) is an important issue for the faculty to take up in the next academic year. Professor Basu and Professor Schmalzbauer suggested convening a discussion group of faculty who have different views surrounding this issue, with the idea that discussions happen in smaller groups before taking the issue to the faculty floor. The other members concurred that doing so would be a good idea. The readings that Professor Hart is assembling about issues surrounding race and racism, and specifically about what students of color experience on campus and in the classroom, could serve as a foundation of some discussions, it was noted.

In their roles as leaders of the Black Student Union (BSU) Joelle Crichlow '22, Maya Foster '23, and Jeremy Thomas '21 joined the meeting at 4:15 P.M. The president, provost, and committee welcomed the students and thanked them for their efforts to raise and address important issues surrounding race and racism on campus. The meeting took place as protests over systemic racism and police brutality were under way throughout the world, sparked by the murder of George Floyd by police.

Professor Brooks assured the students that, while the listening session at the recent faculty meeting had been one way to raise awareness among the faculty, the committee is committed to ensuring that the issues raised by the BSU, including the relationship between academic freedom and harmful and harassing speech, as well as bias-reporting, will be considered further by the faculty in a number of ways. Professor Brooks explained that she is now serving on the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion as the Committee of Six representative, and that a member of the incoming Committee of Six will take on this role when she rotates off the committee and the task force at the end of June. In addition, Professor Brooks informed the students that this year's Committee of Six has met with the incoming members of the committee to ensure that they are well informed about the meetings that have taken place with the BSU, and that the new members are provided with the relevant materials (e.g., reports, self-studies, minutes of the meetings with various individuals and governance bodies).

Professor Schmalzbauer thanked the students for their amazing work and inspiring leadership and noted the importance of maintaining the current momentum that has been generated. She shared the members' recommendation that the members of the BSU and other students engage in discussion with faculty and fellow students in small groups before proposals are brought to the faculty. The students said that they would welcome this opportunity. Professor Sims and Professor Goutte also thanked the students for all they are doing and asked them if they wished to describe their impressions of the faculty meeting listening session and thoughts on next steps. J. Crichlow responded that the listening session had presented a good opportunity for the BSU leadership to voice its concerns to the faculty. She noted that she had appreciated that, during and after the faculty meeting, some faculty members had contacted her to thank the students for sharing information. Some professors had said that they had not been aware of some of the issues that the students had described. M. Foster asked what the faculty's objections might be to amending the college's Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom to address issues of harmful and harassing speech, expressing the view that a discussion of the language that the BSU has proposed would be a good starting point. (M. Foster reminded the members that she had done a good deal of research on the academic freedom statements of peer institutions that address the intersections of harmful and harassing speech and academic freedom. This information will be provided to the incoming Committee of Six, it was noted.)

Continuing the conversation, the students agreed that the events of May and June and the ongoing protests have highlighted the need for ongoing campus conversations about racism, both as it is experienced at the college, and as part of the education that Amherst provides to its students. M. Foster said that she found the listening session at the faculty meeting to be a useful forum for receiving feedback from faculty. It was clear to her from the comments that the faculty made how important student voices are to professors, which was gratifying to realize, she noted, and how student voices are framed in a faculty context. M. Foster stressed the need to establish a base level of security for students on campus, so that all students feel safe. The fear and tension that is occurring right now surrounding race in this country makes this need even more pronounced, she commented. The students noted that creating a safe space for Black students who come back to campus should be a priority for Amherst. They asked whether professors and other members of the campus community are prepared to facilitate the inevitable and necessary discussions on systemic racism that will arise in the fall, given the national climate.

Professor Horton commented on the importance of a range of academic disciplines examining in deeper ways the impact that systemic racism has on campus and in the world. He pledged to participate

in such efforts as part of his professional work as a statistician, for example, studying aspects of police policy and reform that rely on quantitative analysis.

Returning to the issue of the intersections of academic freedom and harmful and harassing speech, the members asked M. Foster if there was one policy at another institution that she views as addressing this issue in an exemplary way. She responded that the policies of Skidmore and Harvard seem particularly well done, while noting that the proposal that the BSU has developed for a revision to Amherst's policy (which had been shared with the members) draws on aspects of six different policies. Professor Basu commented that deciding what is an appropriate bias-reporting and response protocol will be difficult because of divergent faculty views on this question. Some faculty would worry about limitations this might place on readings and conversations that address controversial issues. She reiterated the need to have a vigorous exchange of views on these subjects in small groups, before motions come before the faculty. Professor Basu also suggested that another college goal should be facilitating broader discussions on racism at Amherst, and in the U.S. She informed the students that the ASC has recommended the creation of a community hour at the college. Perhaps some number of these forums could be devoted to conversation about race and racism; relevant readings could be shared and discussed. Bringing student-activists who represent other identities, for example Asian American and Latinx students, would broaden such community-wide discussions in informative ways, Professor Basu commented.

Professor Sims noted that she strongly supports such conversations, as well as efforts by individual departments to find ways to bring the study of systemic racism into their curricula. J. Crichlow commented that she appreciates that departments are having conversations of this kind at this time and also stressed the importance of sustaining such discussions and making permanent changes. One way of accomplishing this goal, J. Crichlow suggested, would be to change the first-year curriculum so that every Amherst student is educated about systemic racism. Professor Brooks noted that, as there are no general education or diversity requirements at Amherst, the faculty needs to find approaches that will enable the college to attain this goal within the college's culture. The incoming Committee of Six will be asked to consider this issue. She stressed the importance of having the faculty take responsibility for educating itself so that professors are equipped to engage in conversation about race and inequality in and beyond the classroom.

President Martin asked the members to share with the students arguments that are most likely to emerge that may present barriers to change, as the students have said that they would find such information helpful. Professor Basu responded that some faculty will worry that a proposal surrounding harmful and harassing speech will impinge on academic and expressive freedom. Some will want to define clearly what kind of speech might be curtailed if the statement is revised. Possible inadvertent consequences of bias-reporting will also trouble some faculty, she said. Professor Basu said that she does not share all of these concerns but that it is important to anticipate them. Provost Epstein commented that some faculty will be concerned that, under a bias-reporting and response protocol, students and others will be permitted to report faculty who present controversial material in their classrooms. Others will be concerned, she imagines, that setting any kind of collegewide requirement will be at odds with the open curriculum. This curriculum, which stressed the importance of student choice, has been deeply embedded at Amherst for fifty years, the provost added. Professor Sims noted that some faculty will see a tension between making students feel safe and shying away from difficult and sensitive material and conversations. Professor Schmalzbauer said that she has heard from faculty who fear that students may decide not to take a course that involves engaging in conversation about race, class, or gender inequalities because they fear saying something wrong and getting themselves or the professor reported. She suggested that the implementation of restorative practices at the college could help eliminate faculty and student fear and avoidance.

J. Crichlow commented that she has never questioned the content of a class and explained that the BSU is not suggesting that a bias-reporting and response protocol should impinge on faculty members' right to present material in their classrooms. Some language, however, does do harm. She suggested that, at the beginning of a class, it would be helpful for everyone if professors set some ground rules—for example, the N-word should not be used. Some students might not know if it is permissible to say the word if reading a passage, for example, and may be uncomfortable. If they are uncomfortable, they might not know what to do. If the rules are made clear, it would alleviate a lot of anxiety, J. Crichlow noted. In her view, a bias-reporting and response protocol would provide an outlet for students to express concerns about harmful language, without worrying about repercussions. M. Foster concurred with these views, noting that having safer and more inclusive spaces will benefit everyone, not just Black students. Accountability does not have to be punitive, and she recommends moving away from thinking about these issues in this way.

Concluding the discussion, J. Thomas suggested that creating a document with frequently asked questions would be helpful to move the conversation forward. He offered to create one if the idea is of interest, outlining points one by one. The focus, in his view, should be on the harm that can be caused by words, rather than on proscribing individuals' conduct. The BSU's goal is to further the mission of academic freedom, as, at present, some individuals feel that they are unable to speak. The members thanked the students and expressed their appreciation and commitment once again, and the meeting ended.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty