

The thirty-fourth 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 29, 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 final decisions needed to complete plans for the fall semester, with President Martin seeking the members' feedback about several different scenarios that are under consideration. She informed the committee that, after extensive consultation with public-health experts and consideration of many factors, a decision has already been made to bring to campus in the fall approximately 1,200 to 1,250 students (just over 60 percent of Amherst's total enrollment and between 70 and 75 percent of those students who indicated interest in returning to campus for their studies). Among the factors that have led to this decision is the necessity of providing each student with a single room, ensuring that the bathroom-to-student ratio is reduced, considering the capacity of hospitals to care for those who may fall ill, and ensuring that social-distancing protocols can be put in place. The decision of the University of Massachusetts to invite all of its students—some thirty thousand—back to campus in the fall, which would have repercussions for the Amherst College community in a number of areas, was a matter of concern, President Martin said. The president noted that she and the senior staff are in the process of considering which students should be invited back in the fall. The hope, she said, is to bring back even more students in the spring—ideally all who wish to be on campus. Should doing so prove to be unwise, however, those students who cannot be here in the fall will have priority in the spring, President Martin noted. In the end, the president cautioned, even after a decision is made, conditions could require that Amherst change its plans before the semester begins, depending on how the pandemic unfolds.

The committee, while recognizing the disappointment that will accompany the decision not to bring all students back, expressed support for a plan to reduce the number of students on campus in the fall—in order to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. The members then discussed the educational benefits of bringing first-years, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, as well as students in a number of other circumstances, to campus in the fall, taking into account a number of factors. It was noted, for example, that there is a need for first-year students to acclimate to the Amherst community and begin to feel that they are a part of the college. The first-year experience of rising sophomores, it was noted, had been truncated as a result of the pandemic, so that they were not able to have a full year on campus. The next academic year would be a critical time for them to consult with their advisors and other faculty about selecting a major. It was also pointed out that many of last year's juniors had had their study-abroad experiences cut short in the spring and had to settle for online learning that, in most cases, was not equivalent to the remote instruction that Amherst faculty offered in the spring. Now rising seniors, some of these students will need to be on campus to make use of facilities in order to work on their theses, the members agreed. In addition, the committee concurred, some students may need to be on campus because the challenges associated with their home situations present barriers to academic success. Professor Brooks asked about Meiklejohn Fellows, for example, and President Martin assured the members that these students are likely among those who would be able to petition to return to campus. Professor Basu asked about international students who are already in this country and may not be able to return to their countries of origin or stay in the United States in the fall. International students who are in the U.S. and have no other place to go would be invited back to campus, the provost said. Most members recommended that first-year students and sophomores be invited back to campus, as well as students in the categories described above.

The president and provost noted that all of these factors, as well as others that have been identified, are being taken into account as part of the decision-making process; there are many compelling arguments for different scenarios, which is what makes it so challenging to arrive at a decision, they said. The members applauded the administration for putting safety first and for the

thought, care, and leadership that is being given to arriving at a plan that works for the Amherst community. ([On July 1, the president announced](#) the following: that for the return to campus in the fall, Amherst will give priority to all first-year students, all transfer students, all sophomores, any seniors who are scheduled to graduate at the end of the fall semester, and to seniors who are returning to campus after spending the fall and/or spring term of the 2019–2020 academic year studying abroad. In addition, it was announced that two categories of students may petition to study on campus: senior thesis writers whose work requires access to campus facilities or materials that would otherwise be unavailable, and students whose home circumstances impede their academic progress. The president wrote that no student will be required to be on campus during the upcoming academic year; all students who wish to study remotely for one or both semesters may do so, even if they have been invited to study on campus. If more students than anticipated choose to study remotely or take an academic leave, the college will extend opportunities to additional students who wish to study on campus, President Martin announced.)

The president asked the members if they thought it would be helpful to call a special faculty meeting the next day, before the public announcement about the fall plans is made. The purpose would be to discuss the final decision about the fall with the faculty and others who attend faculty meetings. The members agreed that doing so would be a very good idea. The members recommended that, at the meeting, the president provide as many details as possible about operations in the fall—from how students will have meals (all meals will be grab-and-go) to how teaching and learning will take place outdoors and in the tents that have been rented. In regard to personal protection equipment, President Martin noted that the college has acquired masks for faculty, students, and staff. Provost Epstein commented that transparent masks, samples of which Amherst acquired recently and which are now being tested by some faculty, seem promising—particularly for language instruction, for which seeing instructors' lips move is very important. At the moment, some things are a work-in-progress, as various processes are being developed and tested, she noted. President Martin explained that everyone will be required to wear masks when in public spaces. In addition, daily symptom self-monitoring and reporting will be required, and that, for students, asymptomatic testing will be conducted on a frequent and regular basis (upon arrival, a few days later, and possibly as much as twice per week throughout the term). Faculty and staff will also need to be tested, but less frequently, President Martin said. ([See the FAQs that have been posted](#) for more details.) President Martin agreed to hold a faculty meeting and noted that plans are under way to hold town-hall virtual meetings for new students and their families, for returning students and their families, and for staff members.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Basu asked whether there is a sense of how many faculty members will teach in person. Provost Epstein said that it appears that, at this time, roughly 35 percent of faculty will teach their courses remotely only, and that the rest of the faculty will teach in a combination of modalities. She noted that it appears that most students on campus should expect to have at least one course that is taught remotely only, though, depending on student's major, they could potentially only have courses that are taught online or have a combination of in-person and remote instruction.

Turning to another topic, Provost Epstein noted the creation of a new Instagram page, [@Blackamherstspeaks](#). She commented that it would be informative for faculty and staff to see the posts that Amherst students and alumni of color are making on the page, which describe their experiences with racism at the college. While many of the posts are moving and difficult to read, they offer a window into the kind of behavior that has caused students pain, and could help to educate the community, the provost noted. Members commented that faculty had asked for particular examples of Black students' experience of racism on campus during the previous listening session, and that this Instagram page might be a good place for faculty to turn. The committee had a wide-ranging discussion of the ongoing work to increase the faculty's awareness of issues of racism on campus and

the steps that are being taken to address them, including restorative justice practices at Amherst and the development of a bias-reporting and response protocol, as well as the pathways to communication that have been established between the Committee of Six and the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. Professor Brooks noted that Professor del Moral has agreed to serve on the task force, beginning July 1. Though she will not be serving on the task force once her term on the Committee of Six ends, Professor Brooks said that she remains committed to working with students on these issues. President Martin said that she is impressed with the efforts that students and alumni are making to raise awareness about issues surrounding racism on campus and to work with the college to address them. The president noted that she had sent a private message of support to the creators of the [@Blackamherstspeaks](#) Instagram account.

While agreeing that the posts can be very valuable in helping the community understand what some students have been experiencing, a member also expressed concern that some posts identify specific members of the community, including staff and untenured faculty members. For example, this member is aware that, based on the posts, some individuals, who have already changed teaching practices to avoid unintentional harm (such as may occur from putting students on the spot or asking them to share personal information), are still identified as doing so. These incidents may have happened many years ago, including before the great increase in awareness generated by the Amherst Uprising. Some posts therefore may give inaccurate information about current teaching practices; faculty members who have been singled out in this way may be reluctant to offer certain courses or present vital course material related to race and racism as a result. Professor Schmalzbauer said that, on a related note, she has been thinking about the need to put some structures in place to help faculty prepare for the difficult and sensitive conversations that can be expected to occur in Amherst classrooms this fall, given the protest movement and the attention it is drawing to racism and police brutality. Professor Brooks agreed and suggested that the faculty diversity and inclusion officers (FDIO)s could play an important role in this effort; she noted that the FDIOs have already begun to develop ways to bring faculty together in conversation about multiple topics. Professor Brooks emphasized that everyone will face challenges in facilitating these conversations in the fall, whether they have long experience or not, and thus it would be helpful to bring multiple faculty together in spaces of exchange. President Martin informed the members that the college will soon launch a web page that will focus on steps that Amherst has and will take to address racism on campus. Professor Sims said that, on that site and in other venues, she thinks it would be helpful to emphasize that processes such as restorative practices and bias reporting are being developed to help educate the community about racism and respond to specific incidents through a constructive process.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Basu agreed with Professors Schmalzbauer and Brooks that it is important that faculty members in all disciplines feel comfortable having open and robust conversations in their classrooms about race and racism, and that colleagues do not shy away from such discussions out of fear that they could be labeled as racist. She suggested that a group of faculty work with the FDIOs to develop and facilitate some workshops and then invite all members of the faculty to participate. Professors Schmalzbauer, Basu, and Sims agreed to participate in this effort. Professor Goutte underlined the importance of the college resource web page as a place where faculty and staff who might not be able to participate in workshops can still find recommended readings and best practices, such that they too can be better informed with ideas on how to improve campus culture; she pointed to the [HSTEM web site](#) as an example of useful resources available to the campus community.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Schmalzbauer suggested that it would be helpful if the college had a liaison to Amherst Books, in order to keep the store informed about plans for this academic year and to help the bookstore strategize about ways to distribute books safely to

students. Provost Epstein agreed to have someone in her office reach out to the owner of Amherst Books.

Continuing with questions, Professor Sims asked about the college's current thinking about options for staff members with jobs that cannot be performed during this time. President Martin responded that, as noted in a communication sent to all staff and faculty on June 24, beginning July 5, staff who will not be able to perform all or some of their work will need to begin using their accrued leave time for those hours that they are unable to work. Staff who are unable to perform all or some of their work remotely or for whom there is no work available on campus will have the opportunity to explore the possibility of performing other work. Supervisors and department chairs will work with staff to evaluate options for remote work, a modified shift or work schedule, and/or a temporary work reassignment. If a suitable alternative or supplemental work is not identified, the Office of Human Resources will work with the staff member to explore other options, for example, use of leaves (vacation, floating holidays, etc.); accrual of a negative leave balance, capped to the maximum accrual for vacation and sick time based on years of service; or taking an unpaid leave of absence, if eligible and approved. Professor Sims asked for further clarification, inquiring specifically whether furloughing staff will be considered. President Martin said that the college will take every measure possible to avoid furloughs, but cannot rule the use of them out, depending on how the pandemic unfolds. Provost Epstein informed the members that some staff members at the Woodside Children's Center (which is associated with the college, but technically is not part of Amherst) will be furloughed briefly, beginning July 8. Initially, they will receive 50 percent of their salaries and be eligible for unemployment benefits that include the additional \$600 per week provided through the CARES Act, which will mean that they will not experience a loss of income. For a brief period in August, before they return to their jobs on August 13, their incomes will be lower, however.

Professor Basu next asked about the library's capacity to scan books for courses and to put materials on e-reserve for fall courses. Provost Epstein noted that, as the library has communicated to the faculty, for this fall, print course reserves cannot be provided safely. While the library was able to provide emergency access to required books in the spring by scanning them—in some cases, scanning the entire book—this practice is not normally allowed under copyright regulations. The provost said that, as faculty develop courses for the fall, the library can support colleagues in a number of ways, including by purchasing a multi-user e-book version, scanning a limited number of chapters from a book, and assisting in checking e-book availability for possible alternatives for a specific title with no online version. To ensure that the library has enough time to prepare reserves so students will have access on the first day of the fall semester, the library needs to know about the materials that faculty need as soon as possible, and the deadline for doing so is August 1. The library will determine e-book availability for required texts and upload links to the e-reserves section of faculty members' Moodle pages, Provost Epstein explained. The library will also reach out to faculty about alternatives if e-books are not available. The goal is to have readings available at least two weeks ahead of where they fall in a syllabus.

Conversation turned to a [proposal from the Committee on Educational Policy \(CEP\)](#) for a grading policy for the 2020–2021 academic year. The discussion was informed by data about FGO usage from last spring that had been provided by Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services. Noting that the CEP had rejected the idea of a universal pass/fail policy for first-year students and had wanted to “avoid creating complex policy instruments, which might have unintended consequences,” Professor Schmalzbauer wondered what these consequences might be. Provost Epstein said that, to her knowledge, schools that switched to such a universal pass/fail policy were unhappy with this approach, as were many students. Schools are returning to their regular grading policies, sometimes with a bit more flexibility regarding pass/fail options, including some that are adopting approaches that resemble Amherst's use of the FGO in the spring, the provost noted. She

said that 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.

The provost noted that, under Amherst's regular policy, students are allowed to use up to four FGOs during their time at Amherst; they are allowed to use only one FGO per term, and it must be elected by the end of the add-drop period. Now, due to the pandemic, the CEP has proposed, extending up to two *additional* FGOs, she said. Use of these *additional* FGOs would be limited to one course during the fall semester and spring semester of this academic year (see the Committee of Six minutes of July 2, 2020, to learn about a change to this proposal). These *additional* FGOs would not "count" against the four FGOs that all students are permitted to use during their time at the college, Provost Epstein explained.

Continuing, Provost Epstein said 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. 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.

The members expressed support for the proposal and the flexibility that it would offer, while also providing a return to a measure of normalcy. It was noted 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. Provost Epstein asked the committee whether it would be necessary to call a faculty meeting in order to vote on the proposal. Concluding the discussion, the members expressed the view that it would be preferable for the incoming Committee of Six, which would meet for the first time on July 2, to discuss the policy and bring a motion forward to the faculty.

The meeting ended with a discussion of how best to move forward with exploring issues related to the service demands being placed on the faculty, including the extent to which such demands may be unequal, a topic of much discussion by the committee this year. The members agreed that more information should be assembled about the service being performed by faculty and made detailed suggestions about what data should be gathered. The provost agreed to convey this information to the incoming Committee of Six. She asked the members whether they felt it might be useful to constitute an ad hoc committee to study this issue and make recommendations, and some members expressed support for doing so. Provost Epstein said that she would convey this view to the incoming committee as well. The members then turned briefly to a personnel matter.

The committee meeting ended with a brief discussion of the current draft of its guidelines for administering teaching evaluations and agreed that the incoming Committee of Six should address one remaining long-term issue—the matter of adapting the form for co-taught classes, a request of tenure-track faculty. The members expressed support for doing so since co-teaching complicates the assessment in a way that is not easily dealt with on the existing form (see a previous discussion of this topic in the committee's minutes of June 8, 2020). Creating such a form will represent a revision to the form that was approved by the faculty, it was noted, and the use of a different/revised form will require the approval of the faculty. The members noted that this structural problem in regard to co-taught courses had not been anticipated or discussed when the faculty approved the form, but had arisen from the Committee of Six's subsequent meeting with untenured faculty. With respect to the short term, the members also noted the importance of developing guidelines for administering teaching evaluations this fall, given that many evaluations will have to be done online and these evaluations will be included formally in reappointment and tenure portfolios. Members highlighted the low response rates for evaluations from this semester and asked the next Committee of Six to

consider how to increase response rates, given that this was a crucial goal of the ad hoc committee that developed the new form.

The president and the provost thanked the members for their service during what has been an exceptionally demanding and uncertain period; they noted that the committee had accomplished a great deal, often under a time frame that has been unusually compressed. The committee expressed its gratitude to President Martin, Provost Epstein, and Associate Provost Tobin for their leadership and work with the committee and on behalf of the college. The members noted that they had learned a great deal and had valued their experience.

The meeting adjourned at 4:45P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty