

The fortieth and final meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2020–2021 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 3:00 P.M. on Monday, June 7, 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 the provost sharing the information that, this year, the Title IX Review Committee has focused on the [interim Title IX policy](#) and obtaining community feedback, before finalizing the policy for the next academic year. Given recent indications from the Department of Education that changes are coming that are very likely to affect Amherst's Title IX policy and grievance process, the Title IX Review Committee is recommending that the college maintain the current interim policy, while awaiting new guidance from the federal government. The committee has drafted a short report that summarizes its activities of the year and its recommendation in regard to the interim Title IX policy. Plans call for the report to be shared with the community soon, Provost Epstein said.

The members briefly turned to a small number of remaining committee assignments. The committee agreed that the provost should extend invitations to the nominees to serve.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Leise asked on behalf of a colleague, if consideration is being given to raising the salary for "Green Deans" at the college. At present, this compensation is at the same level as minimum wage, she noted. Provost Epstein said that conversations are under way to raise the salary level for "Green Dean" positions, though any increase will not take effect during the coming academic year. On behalf of some statistics faculty, Professor Leise next noted that, while these colleagues are highly supportive of the initiatives surrounding special courses that are being sponsored by the Office of the Provost and Dean of the Faculty, they are also concerned that this effort could affect their ability to offer core courses in their departments' curricula. Professor Leise commented that these faculty members suggested that a mechanism be developed to help balance offering courses that fall under the special initiatives with ensuring coverage of core courses. Provost Epstein said that this is a good point. Concluding, Professor Leise shared a request from a colleague that students who cannot return to campus for the fall semester be given flexibility in order not to fall behind in their academic programs. She noted that the colleague had made this suggestion prior to becoming aware of the proposal for an expanded study-away program for fall 2021, which was designed to offer such flexibility (the proposal was approved by the faculty at the June 8, 2021).

Continuing with questions, Professor Umphrey, noting that she is not aware of the details of the voluntary retirement program that is now available to staff, and its implications, asked if the president and provost would provide information about the program. The Voluntary Retirement Option (VRO) was offered to regular, non-faculty employees who will be age sixty-two or older as of their retirement date and have at least fifteen years of service with the college by December 31, 2021. Through this program, which includes a lump-sum payment, employees may retire during the period between May 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021, at an agreed-upon time that meets the needs of the college and the employee. The incentive payment will total 100 percent of the employee's regular annual wages up to \$75,000, plus 50 percent of any regular annual wages above \$75,000. ([Details of the program are available online.](#)) Provost Epstein informed the committee that seventy staff members met the criteria for the program, and that forty-five staff members have decided to take the option. The provost commented that the college may realize some cost savings over an extended period as a result of restructuring positions and lower starting salaries for some positions. The senior staff has been asked to submit plans for how this might be accomplished.

Provost Epstein commented that there will be a number of retirements in the library and information technology, and that three academic department coordinators will also retire. She is working to ensure that replacing those positions that support the academic mission directly are prioritized. Professor Umphrey commented that the timing of these retirements, which will result in

the loss of expertise on which the faculty and staff rely, seems ill-timed, coming at the conclusion of this challenging academic year. President Martin said that, for some time, the staff has been requesting that an option of this kind be offered. Professor Trapani said that he is aware that some staff would have liked to take advantage of the program, but didn't quite meet the criteria. He asked whether the program will be offered in the future, or whether it is a one-time opportunity. President Martin said that there are no plans to offer another voluntary retirement option at this time. She commented that the new chief human resources officer will be charged with thinking through issues related to workforce planning.

Conversation turned to concerns raised by some members about the variability among the letters that departments provide to the Committee of Six when recommending majors for summa cum laude honors. The committee agreed that it would be helpful to Committee of Six readers, who must read theses outside their disciplines, to have theses situated in the context of the standards of quality held by the department making the recommendation. Professor Kingston felt the letter of recommendation should address the substance of concerns that might have been raised, if department members were not unanimous in recommending summa honors. Professor Umphrey argued that, as long as the process for reaching the recommendation is made transparent to the Committee of Six, the committee should in general defer to department's recommendation, even if some department members disagreed. She does not feel that members of the Committee of Six have the expertise necessary to make substantive judgments about such disagreements in fields not their own. Professor del Moral expressed the concern that, when there are disagreements about whether a thesis merits summa honors, at times, the concerns of faculty members who are not full professors may be dismissed. Concluding the discussion, the committee agreed that, as a matter of equity and transparency across departments and to better inform the Committee of Six, all departments should be asked to describe both why the recommended thesis merits summa honors and the process that the department used to determine its recommendation, including which faculty participated.

The committee continued its discussion about clarifying the criteria for tenure, turning to a second draft of the members' proposed revision to the first paragraph of Amherst's current *Faculty Handbook* language about the criteria for tenure ([Faculty Handbook, III., E., 3.](#)) The members thanked Professor Umphrey for drafting the language as a starting point for the conversation. After making some further refinements, the members agreed to share the language via the committee's minutes (see below), and that next year's Committee of Six should be asked to consider the proposal and to share it with the faculty widely—perhaps, with suggestions provided by the new members.

The college values faculty whose commitment to the life of the mind is demonstrated through **EXCELLENCE IN** teaching, scholarship, and **/OR THE** creation of works of art, and **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**. ~~and a concern for the general life of the college.~~ **AMHERST TENURES FACULTY WHO DEMONSTRATE GROWTH, ACHIEVEMENT, AND CONTINUING PROMISE IN BOTH SCHOLARSHIP AND TEACHING, EVINced BY A NOTABLE RECORD OF SCHOLARLY AND/OR ARTISTIC ACCOMPLISHMENT AND A DEMONSTRATED ABILITY TO TEACH UNDERGRADUATES EFFECTIVELY. THOSE TWO ASPECTS OF A CANDIDATE'S RECORD ARE OF PRIMARY CONSIDERATION IN THE TENURE DECISION. STRENGTH IN ONE WILL NOT COMPENSATE FOR SHORTCOMING IN THE OTHER. A RECORD OF SCHOLARLY EXCELLENCE MUST INCLUDE EVIDENCE OF ORIGINAL, PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH AND/OR ITS EQUIVALENT IN THE CREATIVE ARTS. A RECORD OF TEACHING EXCELLENCE MUST INCLUDE EVIDENCE OF THE ABILITY TO CONVEY KNOWLEDGE IN A RIGOROUS AND INTELLECTUALLY STIMULATING WAY AND A COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS' INTELLECTUAL GROWTH, ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENT, AND WELL-BEING. ADDITIONALLY, FACULTY**

MEMBERS ARE EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR HOME DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS, TO THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE COLLEGE, AND TO THEIR PROFESSIONAL FIELDS.

~~Although distinguishing one quality from another—even for the purpose of discussion—separates what is inseparable in the life of a single individual, the distinctions which follow are an attempt to provide a clear description of the qualities the college seeks, especially among faculty who hold appointment without term. Effective teaching is regarded as a prime factor for reappointment and promotion. The college also gives great weight to the continued scholarly growth of faculty members. Research, publication and creative work are considered important indications of such growth. In addition, the college takes account of a faculty member's general contribution to the life of the college community.~~

~~While the balance among the varieties of intellectual distinction prerequisite to tenure may vary from individual to individual and from field to field, effective teaching or significant contribution to the community's well-being cannot compensate for absence of scholarship or creative work. Institutional considerations may play a role at the time of tenure, but if they are invoked, the president will give a full account of the reasons why. Institutional considerations include factors such as the tenure structure of the department, the rank structure of the department, and the fields of competence of the faculty member being considered for tenure in relation to those already represented in the department. Although the college has no formula for the percentage of faculty on tenure, or for the distribution of faculty by anticipated retirement or rank generally or within departments, a particular judgment may be made which takes such factors into account (adopted by trustee vote, April 4, 1992).~~

Discussion turned to [a proposal from the Housing Committee](#) to make revisions to the college's home purchase program. Provost Epstein noted that the proposal, which the administration supports, is being shared with the committee for informational purposes. The hope is to begin putting homes up for sale this summer. Professor Manion expressed concern that the proposal is predicated on the understanding that faculty are not interested in buying college houses, which she knows not to be the case. She is aware of a number of colleagues who want to live close to campus and would welcome the opportunity to buy a college house, but have not been kept informed about the ones that are available for purchase. Professors del Moral and Umphrey said that this is their understanding as well. The members expressed the view that this communication problem should be rectified. Provost Epstein said that she would share this concern with Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations. (He later reported that, due to the poor condition of the homes that had been available for sale, the home purchase program had been suspended three years ago until a proposal to improve the program was developed. It is for this reason that faculty no longer receive communications about college houses that are for sale.) Professor Umphrey expressed support for moving forward with the proposal, commenting that available college houses are becoming more run down, and that the housing market is so competitive that buying a house has become out of reach for many faculty. The proposal should help, in her view. She suggested that it not be assumed that senior faculty might only wish to purchase larger homes, commenting, for example, that colleagues whose children are out of the house might wish to buy a smaller home. Alternatively, a faculty member at an earlier career stage, who may still have young children, may want a bigger home with more space. Professor Kingston suggested that, rather than selling homes to tenure-track faculty as the proposal suggests, it would be preferable for all involved to develop something like a lease-to-buy option, in order to offer flexibility. Overall, the members expressed

support for taking the steps outlined in the proposal. The members then discussed a confidential matter and a personnel matter.

Conversation turned to the topic of granting accommodations, during this time of the global pandemic, to faculty with serious medical conditions and/or who have other compelling reasons for not being able to teach in person. Some members of the committee suggested that, in such cases, consideration be given to allowing faculty to teach online. Professor Manion noted that a wide range of accommodations have been extended to students because of the impact of COVID-19, and urged the president and provost to provide flexibility to faculty and staff as well. The provost said that she would consider a reallocation of duties for faculty members who are unable to teach in person during the pandemic. Professor Trapani remarked on [a presentation](#) this spring that was related to moving past teaching during the pandemic and what that might look like for the future of Amherst, higher education, and the liberal arts.

Discussion turned to [a letter sent by eight faculty members](#), in which they offered a series of proposals to recognize and compensate faculty and staff for their dedication and contributions during the pandemic. Commenting on the college's decision that staff members may carry over the equivalent of one year of vacation time plus the half year of vacation accumulated between July 1 and December 31, Professor Kingston said that the college should continue to be flexible, given all that staff members have done for Amherst during the pandemic. Professor Trapani expressed support for the signatories' proposal surrounding course release, feeling that it would be a reasonable and generous step for the college to take. President Martin, commenting on the fragile state of many students' mental health in the wake of the pandemic, stressed the need to have as many adults available to students as possible to provide support and to serve as mentors. Keeping in mind students' welfare, the idea of adopting the course release proposal would have to be weighed with great care, in the president's view. Professor Trapani responded that faculty who had a reduced teaching load due to a course release could spend more time than is typical focusing on student-related activities. Professor Kingston said that the proposal, in his view, would not serve students or faculty well. The result would likely be simply to redistribute students and that faculty would need to teach the same number of students overall, and so courses would have, on average, slightly larger enrollments, and students would have fewer courses from which to choose. He suggested that the better option would be for the college to invest in salary increases, given that inflation appears to be rising while salaries were frozen last year due to the pandemic. President Martin agreed that focusing on providing salary increases will be the approach that has the most impact, compounding over time, rather than making one-time exceptions. She indicated that this is the direction in which the college plans to move. The committee expressed support for doing so, and Professor Umphrey concurred, particularly because of the finding of the Committee on Priorities and Resources that salaries at the associate and full professor rank continue to fall below college benchmarks.

In closing, Professor Umphrey suggested that the college find ways to commemorate the experience of the pandemic, beginning in the fall, and continue to foster community and build connections among students, faculty, and staff, after all this time spent apart. The members of the committee then expressed thanks to one another for the hard work that has taken place during this challenging year, as did the president and the provost. The members also expressed gratitude to President Martin and Provost Epstein and especially to Associate Provost Janet Tobin. The committee also expressed thanks to Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, for sharing his expertise and providing data to the committee; to other colleagues whom the committee has consulted over the course of the year; to Pam Korenewsky, academic administration/policy specialist, for her outstanding work supporting the committee; and to the academic department coordinators of departments that brought forward tenure, reappointment, and promotion cases this year, for providing essential support for these processes. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty