

The thirty-second 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 8, 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.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Martin informed the members that, since the committee’s last meeting, the college had agreed, as part of a partnership with the Black Student Union (BSU), to match individual donations of up to \$250 from students, faculty, and staff that are made to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the United Negro College Fund, and the Pioneer Valley Workers Center. The BSU has named the project #AmherstActs. The fundraiser began on June 3 and will end on June 10, the president said. The college will donate a maximum of \$20,000 in matching funds, she noted. (Later, it was learned that, all told, including the funds that the BSU raised and the college’s match [which, in the end, was a dollar-for-dollar match, with no cap, and was not tied to individual donations], #AmherstActs raised \$183,000, with approximately \$115,000 going to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, \$36,000 to the United Negro College Fund, and \$32,000 to the Pioneer Valley Worker’s Center.)

President Martin next updated the members about her continuing efforts to draw on the expertise of scientists to learn more about the processes and supplies that the college would need to have in place in order to bring Amherst students, faculty, and staff back to campus safely. She feels, more and more, that it may be possible to do so. Eric Lander, a geneticist, molecular biologist, and mathematician who is the president and founding director of the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, has informed her that he believes that, in a matter of two months, the institute will be able to provide sufficient COVID-19 testing for students at Massachusetts colleges and universities. These tests, he has said, would offer very quick results—potentially within twenty-four hours—and are anticipated to cost about \$25.00 per test or less, depending on demand.

Continuing the conversation, the president noted that different experts in public health have different ideas about the frequency of testing for students, and she shared some possible models with the committee, including testing students upon arrival, two days later, and then every three or four days, perhaps. If no asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic carriers of the virus are found after two weeks, then testing could perhaps be conducted less frequently, the president said. Professor Goutte asked if “pooled testing” has been considered, as this method allows more people to be tested with fewer tests. She noted that those within a cohort of students who would be living together, for example, could be pooled and tested with a single test, yielding more information for one test. The president said that pooling has been discussed, and that this is one of the strategies the experts are weighing; she continues to get recommendations from experts.

Professor Basu asked if the college will consider bringing students back to campus a few weeks before classes start so that they can be tested and orient themselves before beginning their academic work. She also wonders whether the ability to have sufficient testing will be a determinative factor when deciding how many students can return to Amherst. President Martin said that it is still not known whether sufficient testing will be available, and that the college will not bring students, faculty, and staff back to campus unless testing of students can take place. Provost Epstein said that she can imagine bringing most students back to campus two or three days before classes start, though some students, for example, those participating in the summer bridge program, might return to campus some weeks before classes start.

Professor Schmalzbauer asked if plans call for faculty and staff to be tested if they will be on campus. President Martin responded that the modeling that has been done for the college has focused only on the impact of students spreading the virus to faculty and staff. For a variety of reasons, the provost and president noted, it is thought that it is less likely that faculty and staff would transmit the virus to students. Faculty and staff should not be in close contact with students on campus, however, if proper social-distancing procedures are followed, the provost said. President Martin commented that, for insurance

reasons, Amherst's health center can only test students. In addition, it is unclear, for legal reasons, that the college can require faculty and staff to be tested.

Professor Sims next returned to the issue of the challenges that faculty-parents will face if schools and daycare facilities operate under a staggered schedule when these entities reopen, which it appears they may by fall. She asked if the college will allow scheduling approaches that will permit flexibility that is based on individual circumstances. For example, some faculty members may need to come to campus to teach and hold office hours only on the days of the week that children will be at school or daycare, and to teach remotely on other days. Provost Epstein responded that flexibility under these conditions will indeed be key. She said that the approaches that Professor Sims had suggested would certainly be viable. President Martin and Provost Epstein emphasized that the college cannot return to "business as usual," and that things will not be perfect in the next academic year, given all the challenges ahead. At the same time, they stressed that, if students are able to return to campus, it will be essential for them to spend some time in person with as many faculty members as possible; students have indicated that they very much missed their in-person interactions with their teachers. Professor Sims thanked President Martin and Provost Epstein for their support of caregivers and the willingness of the college to be so accommodating.

Professor Sims asked whether staff members will have similar flexibility. President Martin said that Lisa Rutherford, chief policy officer and general counsel, and Maria-Judith Rodriguez, chief human resources officer, are developing policies and protocols that should be completed and brought forward to the senior staff for consideration soon. Professor Basu noted the importance of consulting with academic department coordinator (ADC)s as part of planning efforts surrounding departments. She commented that some ADCs work on an academic-year schedule, and their pay or vacation time will need to be adjusted if they must return to the college early to help prepare course materials and perform other work, in anticipation of starting the academic year early, and on campus.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Basu wondered if the college might consider providing an outdoor space and financial support for babysitting on campus for the children of faculty who are teaching on campus, perhaps inviting students who have been tested to provide this service. Provost Epstein suggested that it might be preferable for faculty to hire babysitters instead, as she understands that it may be problematic, for legal reasons, for the college to provide babysitters, including those who are Amherst students. President Martin expressed concern about the idea of Amherst students going off campus to family homes, as the college will likely need to restrict students' off-campus activity, given the risks surrounding the spread of the virus. Professor Goutte wondered if the college might be willing to pay for testing for potential babysitters who are not Amherst students, and in this way support the faculty. Provost Epstein responded that, while reasonable people might disagree, she does not think that this is an appropriate use of the college's resources.

Conversation turned to adjustments to the registration process that may be needed if students return to campus in the fall, and the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Academic Structures During COVID-19 (ASC) are approved. Some members wondered whether reimagined course descriptions will include information about the modality in which the course will be taught. Given the uncertainty surrounding how the pandemic may unfold, and because faculty may need (based on enrollments and other factors) or want to shift how they will teach a particular class, Provost Epstein said that she would worry about including such information, as things may change. Certainly, if a course will definitely be taught remotely, and the reason for doing so is clear, it would be fine to include this information, she noted. Professor Horton expressed the view that it will be important to know the format in which courses will be taught by the time revised course proposals must be submitted to the Committee on Educational Policy (June 19).

Professor Sims next asked whether athletic competition will be allowed in the fall. Provost Epstein said that it is unlikely, but not impossible, that there will be NESCAC (New England Small College Athletic Conference) competition in the fall, but she thinks that it should be possible for students to work on

strength and conditioning and other forms of training, depending on the activity. The provost noted that Austin Sarat, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty, is chairing a working group that is thinking about a range of issues related to athletics in the COVID-19 environment. The other members of the group are Liz Agosto, dean of students; Timothy Banks, assistant coach; Gregg DiNardo, associate director of athletics; Isabella Edo '21; Don Faulstick, director of athletics; Maria Rello, director of sports medicine; Professor Catherine Sanderson; Justin Serpone, head coach of men's soccer; and Alexander Versfeld '21.

In discussing how the cohorts of students who would live together would be constituted, President Martin commented that the college will be more open than it might usually be to allowing students to choose the group of up to ten with whom they will live. The members of the student advisory group with whom the president has been meeting expressed trepidation about living with students whom they don't know well, as they worry that some students might not comply with social-distancing rules that are put in place. Professor Schmalzbauer said that she had been thinking that the need to constitute these cohorts might present opportunities to build community across difference. She can understand however, that living with strangers might make students feel less safe, under the circumstances. Still, she would worry about students who are not invited into one of the cohorts for one reason or another. Professor Brooks pointed out that students from underrepresented groups often rely on one another for support, and she feels that it would be important that they be able to choose to live with friends during what promises to be a stressful time. It makes a difference to students to be surrounded by others whom they trust, she noted. Professor Sims agreed that close friends are important for well-being and suggested that students be allowed to choose two or three friends as members of their cohort so that they know some people very well in their groups, while still being placed with other students to promote building community across difference.

Professor Goutte next asked for clarification about a number of matters related to how courses would be structured and how courses would be counted in the next academic year. She inquired whether a class of forty students, which would meet the criterion for having to be taught remotely by virtue of its enrollment—even if students are on campus—could sometimes be divided into four sections of ten students that would meet in person. Provost Epstein said that this structure would be ideal.

Turning to another question, Professor Goutte suggested that it would be useful to think in terms of courses, rather than course credits, when advising students, but she believes she heard Provost Epstein reiterate that the “three” that is referenced in the ASC's report refers to course credits. In that case, two lab courses that are 1.5 courses would be a full load for a student. If this is so, Professor Goutte said that there will be a significant number of STEM students who will not want to heed this recommendation, and instead will want to take four “courses” ($1.5 + 1.5 + 1$). Professor Goutte commented that, for many of these students, four courses will be a reduction in load when compared to normal semesters. She noted, for example, that 45 percent of students (fifty-eight students) enrolled in CHEM-221 in the fall of 2019 were registered for a total of five or more course credits. She stressed the importance of making the ASC's recommendation clear to advisors, and of emphasizing the flexibility and case-by-case assessment that will be permitted under the recommendation. Provost Epstein said that having students take two lab courses ($1.5 + 1.5$) as a regular load in the coming year is a recommendation and not a requirement.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Horton said he agrees that it's important to understand the implications of the lab courses and half courses. One thing that should be kept in mind is that different sophomores might have different default requirements, based on their prior course selection, he noted. Professor Horton then presented the following scenarios to illustrate this point. Consider students who took chemistry and biology (with labs) in their first year, he said. They still have two half-courses that they can count toward graduation and so could take $1.5 + 1.5 = 3$ as their course load for

the fall. If these students were his advisees, he would encourage them to consider this, though would approve requests to add an additional course outside of STEM, perhaps denoting that third course (but fourth course credit) with the flexible grading option (FGO). He then said to consider students who took chemistry and biology (with labs) in their first year, along with two half-courses in music. They have no further half courses that they can count toward graduation. They would need to take the same two science courses with labs, but they would only count as 1 + 1, so the students would need to elect an additional full course. Professor Horton said that, under such circumstances, he would strongly discourage such a student from enrolling in four courses in the fall, which he described as the “moral equivalent” of a 5.0 course load.

Professors Goutte and Sims said that, as advisors they would be uncomfortable recommending that students take two lab courses as a full load. Provost Epstein said that advisors will have to use their best judgment about what is best for each of their advisees. Professor Goutte stressed the importance of ensuring that premed students be advised with all of these issues in mind, or they could potentially not be able to meet all of their requirements. Provost Epstein noted that students should be encouraged to pick up another course during the January term, which would run for four weeks under the proposal. Professor Horton said he is comfortable suggesting to students that they take three courses and concentrate on completing them successfully and then take a course in January. Provost Epstein said that she anticipates that the offerings during January will be robust, and that students will potentially be able to register for January courses at the same time they register for their fall courses.

Professor Basu next asked if it would be possible and desirable, when teaching a seminar remotely, to shift from teaching one day a week for two hours and forty-five minutes to two days a week for eighty minutes each day. She imagines that having break-out groups and some asynchronous instruction would also be helpful in a remote environment, she said. Provost Epstein expressed support for this approach and noted the desirability, from a student-learning perspective, of reducing the length of time that students spend on Zoom.

Professor Sims asked if thought has been given to how the add/drop period will be structured, with the goal of trying to keep students from “gaming” the system. She suggested that strategically minded students might sign up for four classes and then drop one, which could be disruptive, given all the extra thought that must go into course sizes this semester. Provost Epstein said that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) will need to have a conversation about how much “shopping” can be tolerated during this challenging time. Provost Epstein said that the registrar will try to keep students in the courses that they pre-registered for previously, to the degree possible, so that when they register in the summer, they will not be starting from scratch (this approach was later changed). Professor Brooks expressed support for advising students to take three courses in the fall, to start, and emphasizing the opportunity to take an additional course during January. Professor Goutte asked if it would be possible to give students who take three courses in the fall priority when deciding which students can enroll in January courses. Provost Epstein noted that doing so will depend on the numbers and said that she would consider the idea. She noted that, by the end of registration in the July, it will be necessary to know which students are in which courses, so that the number of slots available for first-year students is also known.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to a conversation—following up on the May 21 listening session—about next steps that the committee and the college should undertake to support diversity and inclusion on campus, including combating racism. The members also had a discussion about issues related to the service demands being placed on the faculty, including the extent to which such demands may be unequal and ways of moving forward to explore and address this issue.

Professor Brooks said that she has been pleased with the commitments that the college has made to foster diversity and inclusion and combat racism on campus. She feels that it is important not to lose momentum and to make sure that there is a list of questions and action items, and to be clear which college

bodies are responsible for moving forward on each. She suggested that the first step is for the current Committee of Six to meet again with the leadership of the BSU and suggested that the new Committee of Six do so in the future and that its members continue with the important work that was done this semester. The members asked Professor Brooks to invite the students to meet with the committee at next Monday's meeting, and she agreed to do so. She also suggested that the members of this year's committee share their notes with the incoming members, as well as the BSU's proposed revision to the college's [Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#). Incoming members should engage the faculty in a discussion of the intersection of hateful and harassing speech and the college's statement, as the current committee has suggested, Professor Books noted.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Basu, thanked Professor Brooks for facilitating the listening session and said that she is hopeful that the college will develop the scaffolding to direct students to courses on race and racism. By compiling a list and descriptions of these courses and posting them together online, the offerings will become more visible to advisors and students. She expressed hope that faculty will create a new cluster of courses with this focus. Provost Epstein suggested that the first-year seminar model provides an ideal vehicle for offering these courses, as three, four, or five seminars on race and racism will attract a significant number of students. Professor Basu agreed. She suggested that the college collaborate more closely not just with the BSU, but with other student groups, and that anti-Asian racism is also an issue that the college should seek to address.

In addition to enhancing the curriculum in these ways, Professor Basu stressed that Amherst needs to learn more about the quotidian forms of racism that students experience both in the classroom and in their social lives at the college. She and several other members commented that, while it is compelling and informative to hear from students directly, it is unfair and exploitative to put them in the position of having to educate faculty and others in a public venue about their experiences; some students have said that it should not be their responsibility to do so. Some members suggested that an anonymous survey of students might be a good tool to gather information. Provost Epstein said that it would be helpful to find a way to make a list of actions that make students uncomfortable in the classroom. Professor Schmalzbauer suggested making use of restorative practices to create a space for faculty and students to come together to discuss these issues. She feels that this approach would be preferable to conducting a survey. She noted that some students wrote about their experiences with racism following the Amherst Uprising, and that these comments may have been preserved. Professor Schmalzbauer and President Martin expressed the view that providing the Amherst community with a list of relevant readings would be a good way of educating everyone about issues surrounding race and racism, and specifically about what students of color may be experiencing on campus and in the classroom. Professor Schmalzbauer noted that Professor Hart has been creating [a list of readings](#) as part of his work for Restorative Practices Amherst College (RPAC) and that she would consult with him. It would be ideal if the community could come together to read and discuss select readings. Professor Sims agreed and also noted that there were more anti-racism training sessions offered for faculty following Amherst Uprising, and that possibly providing them again would be helpful.

The meeting ended with a discussion about issues related to the service demands being placed on the faculty, including the extent to which such demands may be unequal, and ways of moving forward to explore and address this issue. The members suggested that more information be gathered about the service being performed by faculty. One approach might be to ask department chairs how departmental service is allocated. In addition, the Office of Institutional Research could provide a vehicle for faculty to self-report about their service, it was noted. It might also be helpful, in conducting this research, to draw on the Office of Diversity and Inclusion for support. Provost Epstein said that she would see if Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, would have time to work on this project over the summer, while noting that he remains very busy, due to all the changes that are being made as a result of the pandemic.

Professor Brooks expressed support for moving forward with this effort, commenting that many faculty are feeling overwhelmed by the burdens that service places on them, given all of their other responsibilities as scholars and teachers. Provost Epstein commented that there is a tradition of Amherst faculty wanting to play a primary role in the governance of the college and a faculty-centric culture. In many realms where it might be possible to do so, faculty do not want to delegate service to staff members, she noted. Professor Basu concurred that service can be rewarding and can allow faculty to have an impact, while noting that some faculty are called to do a great deal more service than others—from departmental service, such as mentoring untenured faculty, serving on search committees, and leading the external review process—to college service that may include service on demanding ad hoc committees and standing committees. She suggested that some forms of service could be made more interesting if they were tethered to faculty research, teaching, and administrative leadership opportunities. She stressed the importance of acknowledging and rewarding this form of work. Professor Basu said that she is impressed that a number of faculty were interested enough in service to participate in the leadership program that had recently been offered through the provost's office. Professor Goutte expressed gratitude for the course release that is granted to the members of the Committee of Six, as she sees this as a signal that service is valued, as time is provided for faculty to devote to this work. Provost Epstein commented that the down side to course release for service is that faculty are taken out of the classroom, and students suffer, in her view. Professor Schmalzbauer said that she has observed that, for many faculty, research productivity is reduced after tenure. Others struggle with being active researchers, dedicated teachers, and engaged citizens of the college. Something has to “give,” she noted.

Conversation turned to [a note from Professor Trapani to the committee](#) about the idea that faculty should prioritize teaching over research because of the additional preparation for teaching that is now required due to the pandemic, as the provost had suggested at a faculty meeting earlier. Professor Basu expressed the view, which was shared by the ASC, 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, she noted. In regard to Professor Trapani's concerns about caregivers, it was noted that the ASC also made recommendations to try to support faculty-parents and other faculty-caregivers during the pandemic, as noted earlier. Provost Epstein said that faculty are welcome to send suggestions to the Committee of Six, which remains open to thinking more about this issue.

Concluding the meeting, Professor Basu, noting that the ASC would not be weighing in on the grading system for the next year, asked the provost how she envisions consideration of this issue would occur. The provost said that next year's CEP and Committee of Six should develop a proposal over the summer that the faculty would need to approve.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty