

The thirty-second meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2020–2021 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, March 29, 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 a discussion of nominees to serve on the memorial minute committee for David Armacost, professor of mathematics, emeritus, who died on March 10, 2021.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Martin, noting the plans of the Association of Amherst Students (AAS) to host an open meeting on the topic of reimagining the Amherst College Police Department (ACPD), suggested that it would also be helpful to engage faculty and staff in a conversation about the issues under discussion—among them whether the college should consider disarming the ACPD. John Carter, chief of police and director of public safety, has been thinking through a number of possibilities and has developed a preliminary proposal for some changes to the ACPD. He and Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, would be attending the AAS meeting to participate in the discussion and answer questions, the president said. It is their hope also to speak with students, faculty, and staff in small groups this semester. The open meeting, to which President Martin said she understands some alumni have been invited, would be held in the evening (on March 29). Referencing the complexities involved in the issues at hand and the range of views that individuals hold on the subject of policing, the president commented that she feels it is important to share information and to provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas among members of the college community. President Martin noted that the student anti-racism advisory group conveyed to the board of trustees its views about reimagining the ACPD, and informed the committee that the Faculty Leadership Committee for the Anti-Racism Plan has also discussed this issue. Having a broader conversation seems essential, in her view, to inform decisions that are ultimately within the purview of the board of trustees, she noted. The members agreed and decided to return to this subject later in the meeting when considering the faculty meeting agenda.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Umphrey first asked, on behalf of a colleague, whether faculty and staff will be able to use the gym this summer. The provost said that, while it is hoped that providing access will be possible, it is too early to know, given the uncertainty about the pandemic.

Professor Umphrey next asked, on behalf of another colleague, about finding ways to inform the faculty further about [the bias-reporting protocol](#) that was developed by the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, with input from the Committee of Six, and shared with the community in December of 2020. Among other things, the colleague wishes to know how the review process will work in relation to incidents that take place in the classroom, Professor Umphrey noted. There was then a discussion about possible ways of sharing additional information about the college’s [anti-discrimination and harassment policy](#) and the bias-reporting protocol, and particularly the process that is now being used to consider and address reports of identity-based bias, discrimination, and harassment, including incidents that may take place in a classroom setting. It was noted that there is now an [online portal](#) through which complaints of identity-based harm, including bias incidents, harassment, and discrimination, can be submitted. A team of professional staff and faculty reviews all complaints. Based on legal standards and college policies, the review team evaluates whether the incidents appear to constitute bias or discrimination and harassment. If the incident is a possible Title IX violation, it is handled through the Title IX process. If an incident appears to fit the legal definition of any other identity-based harassment or discrimination under civil rights or other relevant laws, the incident is managed under the college anti-discrimination and harassment policy and is investigated by internal or external individuals with expertise in the relevant law. If the subsequent investigation shows that harassment or discrimination may have occurred, the matter will be referred to the existing grievance or

disciplinary processes for faculty, staff, and students. If the initial review team considers the incident to be bias, it will activate the resources associated with the [Center for Restorative Practices](#).

After reviewing this process, the committee considered possible venues for sharing information—among them, during a meeting of the chairs of academic departments and programs, the Committee of Six (with information included in the minutes), and/or at a faculty meeting. After weighing the pros and cons of each possibility, and trying to gauge current interest about this issue, the members decided that it seems premature to move forward with presentations about this topic at this time, given the current lack of data about how the new protocols are being applied. Since the new procedures and policies have been launched quite recently, it would be best, all agreed, to wait to see how things are working and then to engage in further conversation. It was noted that faculty who have questions are always welcome to contact the Norm Jones, chief equity and inclusion officer, and/or Allen Hart or Pawan Dhingra, faculty equity and inclusion officers.

Continuing with questions, Professor Kingston asked the provost if it would be possible to learn the current status of the [open-access resolution](#) adopted by the faculty in 2013 and [the Octagon](#), the related online repository of open-access articles written by Amherst faculty. Professor Kingston wondered about the viability and efficacy of the resolution and the Octagon, given advances in technology (in particular, modes of online searching that are now available). There are also financial implications related to the current policy that might be useful to consider, it was noted. Provost Epstein responded that the subject of open access and the Octagon had been discussed at a meeting of the chairs of academic departments and programs last year. She said that she would reach out to Martin Garnar, director of the library, who had not yet assumed his appointment when the conversation had taken place, to learn more about his views on this matter and current usage of the Octagon and report back to the committee. Provost Epstein noted that M. Garnar is already scheduled to give a presentation at the April 16 chairs' meeting and could perhaps address this issue then.

Professor Trapani next inquired, on behalf of a colleague, as to whether the college has considered using [turnitin](#) software as one way of trying to curb academic dishonesty. Provost Epstein, who noted that there is a rise in the number of cases of academic dishonesty at the college that is very disturbing, said that some faculty have had concerns about aspects of the use of this tool. The provost said that she is aware that, while some peer institutions use turnitin, others, like Amherst, do not. She noted that the class deans and others are concerned about the growing number of academic dishonesty cases and hopes that the full faculty will address this issue soon.

Concluding his questions, Professor Trapani suggested that it would be helpful to have those who are leading the implementation of Workday attend a meeting of the Committee of Six or the chairs of academic departments and programs to discuss some issues with Workday about which they may not be aware. Provost Epstein noted that she understands that, in response to issues that have been raised, a number of changes to Workday will be put into effect in mid-April to address matters that are having an impact on the workload of chairs. Professor Trapani expressed the view that it is important to have clear lines of communication between users and those who are leading the development of the Workday system to make sure all concerns are being conveyed, so that they may be addressed. The provost said that she would contact Sarah Barr and Katie O'Hara Edwards to see if they can attend a meeting of the chairs to discuss Workday. The members then turned to personnel matters.

Conversation turned to the proposal of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) that the college discontinue use of the current 14-point grading scale and adopt a 4.33 grading scale. Initially, most members hesitated to revise the proposal from the CEP, deferring to that committee's consideration of this issue. However, after reviewing information about the percentage of students who receive A-plus grades at Amherst and the proportion of A-plus grades given by departments—data provided by Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, at the members' request—the committee raised concerns surrounding student equity. On the basis of these concerns, the members expressed a

strong preference for a 4.0 scale and continuing to offer the A-plus, but making this grade worth 4.0 and thus an honorific grade. The data revealed that departments vary widely in the frequency with which they assign A-plus grades, with some awarding none or few, while in other departments, more than 10 percent of all grades awarded are A-plus. As a result, GPA cut-offs used for Latin honors may be unfairly skewed by the tendency of a few departments to award the grade, rather than reflecting unbiased measures of student achievement. Professor Trapani noted that, in majors with courses that rarely or infrequently award A-plus grades, students are ultimately earning GPAs that are lower than if A-plus grades were more frequently awarded within their courses. In addition, he expressed that a student's GPA on a 4.3 scale may be viewed differently than the same GPA on a 4.0 scale (e.g., 3.6 on a 4.3 scale vs. 3.6 on 4.0 scale), which might have an impact on graduate program applications, for example. The committee also commented that the number of A-plus grades being awarded is on the rise and is contributing to grade inflation among departments. Given these equity concerns, which are structural in nature, the members decided to provide the CEP with the data that had been shared by J. Barba and to ask the CEP to reconsider its proposal. It was noted that the revised timeline of the Workday project will allow a vote on this matter to take place at a May 4 faculty meeting, if one is held.

Conversation turned to [the recommendation of the steering committee for the Five College Certificate in Queer and Sexuality Studies](#) that the certificate be renamed the Five College Certificate in Queer, Trans, and Sexuality Studies. [The CEP supported renaming the certificate](#), as did the Committee of Six. The members voted six in favor and zero opposed to propose that Amherst adopt the new name and discontinue use of the previous name, and six in favor and zero opposed to forward the proposal to the faculty. It was noted that the requirements for the certificate will not change.

The members next reviewed a draft agenda for an April 6 faculty meeting. Conversation returned to the topic of having Chief Carter attend the meeting to provide an update on the conversations around reimagining the ACPD. The members felt that it would be desirable to do so, both to inform those who attend faculty meetings and to learn more about individuals' views on this subject. It was noted that individuals have very different opinions about what constitutes a safe campus, and that the goal of a faculty meeting conversation should be to provide a safe and productive space in which colleagues will feel comfortable sharing what they think. In addition, it was agreed that it would be informative to have Betsy Cannon Smith, chief advancement officer, provide an update on the *Promise* campaign. Professor Manion requested that Matt McGann, dean of admission and financial aid, be invited to speak to the faculty about admissions. Given the extraordinary challenges of the past year, she feels that faculty would be interested in hearing from him about how things have been going.

The members voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward the faculty meeting agenda to the faculty.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty