

Minutes of the Committee of Six of Monday, March 31, 2014

Amended April 11, 2014

The nineteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2013-2014 was called to order by President Martin in the President's office at 3:30 P.M. on Monday, March 31, 2014. Present were Professors Corrales, Kingston, Harms, Lyle McGeoch, Miller, and Schneider, Dean Call, Provost Uvin, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The meeting began with President Martin reviewing with the members the schedule for this week's meetings of the Board of Trustees, which will include the Board's annual executive session with the Committee of Six and discussion with the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP). The President explained that the trustees will meet with two members of the Strategic Planning Committee on the Integration of Curricular and Co-Curricular Learning and with consultant Richard Keeling for a discussion about the area of student affairs. Professor Cobham-Sander, chair of the Strategic Planning Committee on Diversity and Community, will give a preview of the work of her committee to members of the Board and the administration. President Martin commented that the Board will be discussing the College budget, noting that emphasis is being placed on tying the budget process more closely to the priorities of the College, and to having systems in place to ensure that budgets are right-sized so individual units can avoid overruns.

Professor Schneider asked what has prompted a re-examination of the budget process, since it has seemed to him that the budget has always been balanced, at least according to the reports that have been provided to departments and to the Faculty. President Martin said that unit-level budgets have not always reflected spending. Some areas of the budget have been generously funded, resulting in under-spending at times, while other areas have been under-budgeted, with over-spending often occurring. As a result, a reconciliation process has been used at the end of the budget cycles to balance the budget. A distributed reserve of approximately \$4 million, which formerly served as a cushion that was used to reconcile the budget, has now been depleted, President Martin informed the members. The amount that the College pays on its debt, which amounts to a considerable expense, has now been folded into the operating budget, for purposes of transparency and tracking. These expenses have been kept separate from the budget in the past. The new approach will be to seek to project actual expenses across the College and to fund units accordingly, President Martin noted.

Continuing the discussion about the budget, President Martin noted that, in addition to improving the ways in which the College can plan for and make informed decisions about spending, another reason for adopting the new approach is to seek to help address Amherst's rising dependence on its endowment to support the operating budget. While the "draw" (the percentage of the endowment that is used to support spending) on the endowment remains at an acceptable range (below 5 percent), the draw will need to increase next year to 4.7 percent to support the budget. The trustees are concerned that, with the endowment now providing more than 50 percent of the funding to support College operations, projecting expenses and monitoring spending closely have become more important than ever before. Volatility in the economic climate has an effect on endowment returns, which can cause anxiety. Since the College is relying on funding from the endowment more and more, the trustees are having in-depth discussions about the most appropriate approach—one that reduces the risk of negative returns, while taking advantage of investments that might result in higher returns. The fact is that the College collects less net tuition (the amount of tuition paid minus the amount of financial aid

provided by the College) than its peers. Professor Schneider asked whether, given this set of circumstances, Amherst can afford to have a “no-loan” policy. President Martin said that the College is fortunate to be in a financial position that makes it possible to have this policy, at present. If the financial environment worsens for any reason, there are a number of “levers” that would make it possible for the College to maintain its financial equilibrium. Adjustments to such policies as need-blind admission for international students and no loans as part of aid packages would reduce expenses in a crisis, but no doubt the College would choose other options first. Professor Corrales asked what areas pose the most significant problems when it comes to spending at a higher rate than has been budgeted. President Martin commented that casual labor and overtime, particularly within Dining Services and the physical plant, are the areas in which spending most often exceeds budgeted amounts. Professor McGeoch asked if the excess expenses associated with casual workers extends to student workers. President Martin said that this problem does not extend to student workers, as far as she understands. Some of the programs that have been developed recently to address student life issues have resulted in unbudgeted expenses. Examples include the Grab-and-Go program and extending the hours that Valentine is open.

Turning briefly to another student life issue, the place of athletics at the College, President Martin asked the members if they had been able to read the report of the Special Committee on the Place of Athletics at Amherst (2002), otherwise known as the Diver Committee, which she had provided to the Committee, at the members’ request. Several members said that they had read the document, while others had not yet had time. Everyone who had read the report had been impressed with it. President Martin commented that it will be informative to learn the results of the data-gathering exercise that is currently being undertaken by the Committee on Education and Athletics. In addition, she feels that appointing an ad hoc committee, much like the one that produced the “[Diver Report](#),” will be an important means of exploring this issue fully. President Martin applauded the Diver Committee’s excellent work and said that she favors following the committee’s recommendation that the President constitute an ad hoc committee similar to the Diver committee to review the place of athletics at Amherst every three to five years. A standing committee, burdened with a regular charge, would not have the time needed to take on this project, in her view. President Martin said that it is her intention to create an ad hoc committee to study the place of athletics at Amherst. Professor Kingston indicated his support for this plan, while suggesting that the Diver Committee had so effectively presented the pertinent issues, which remain much the same, that it would likely not be necessary to recreate much of that committee’s work. Professor McGeoch agreed, while noting the need to reassess the major issues based on new data that would become available. Professor Schneider asked if most numbers remain the same in regard to the number of “athletic admits” that are permitted and the size of athletics teams. President Martin commented that she believes that not much has changed in this regard since the Diver Committee completed its work in 2002, but agreed that she would double check these figures.

Continuing with the discussion of athletics, President Martin noted that she had recently attended a session of the Amherst Leads program, at the invitation of the group, and had offered remarks. At the event, a number of students had shared that their professors had made remarks, sometimes in an off-handed way, during classes about student-athletes. The students had found some comments to be disparaging and hurtful. Discussion at the event had focused on the stigma that some students feel is associated with being a student-athlete at the College. Professor Kingston wondered whether some faculty members may have made statements out of a sense of frustration, commenting that the regular absences of student-athletes from Friday classes for

purposes of participating in competitions, for example, can have a significant impact. Professor Schneider expressed frustration that Friday afternoon cannot be used for academic purposes because of athletic competitions. While recognizing the reason for frustration, President Martin suggested that it is important that faculty members take care in the ways in which they discuss their views about athletics in their classes, so as not to make student-athletes feel stigmatized.

Under “Announcements from the Dean,” Dean Call noted that the Lecture Committee nominated Edward Melillo, Assistant Professor of History and Environmental Studies, to deliver this year’s Max and Etta Lazerowitz Lecture on April 8. His talk is titled “Out of the Blue: Nantucket and The Pacific World.” The Lazerowitz Lecturer, a member of the Amherst Faculty below the rank of full professor, is appointed annually, he noted. The Dean next discussed a personnel issue with the members. Following that conversation, the Dean informed the members that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) would be considering the feedback that the Committee of Six had offered on the proposal to collect, archive, and distribute student theses in electronic form. The Committee then turned to personnel matters.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Kingston asked the President if it would be possible for her to share with the Committee redacted versions of recent reports about student affairs that have been prepared by consultants. He expressed the view that doing so would be helpful as a means of preparing for the Committee’s meetings with the Board and consultant Dr. Richard Keeling. Noting that some portions of the reports are confidential, President Martin responded that she would review the reports to determine if she could meet Professor Kingston’s request and said that she intends to share the findings of Keeling Associates with the Faculty. The President noted that two of the three consultants’ reports of last year had focused largely on the Counseling Center and its relations with the Office of the Dean of Students, while consultants are now studying the whole domain of student affairs at the College.

The members next discussed the progress of the search for a Dean of New Students to succeed Dean O’Hara. President Martin and Dean Call said that there are two excellent candidates for the position and said that it is their hope to make a decision about the position within the next week. President Martin noted that the search for a new director of the Counseling Center is making good progress and said that it is her understanding that two candidates for the position will be brought to campus within the next two weeks. The Dean then shared a preliminary list of members of the search committee for the Dean of Students. After some further conversation about the make-up of the committee, the Dean agreed to speak with Ms. Coffey and to report back to the Committee of Six about the membership of the search committee once it is finalized.

Conversation turned to [Dean O’Hara’s cover note](#) regarding the [Orientation Committee’s proposal](#) to revise its charge and membership, and the [proposal](#) itself, which Dean O’Hara, chair of the committee, had forwarded to the Committee of Six. (See [Faculty Handbook at IV., S., 1., q.](#) for the current charge and membership of the Orientation Committee.) Provost Uvin offered to leave the meeting if it was felt that his presence would constrain conversation. The members did not feel it necessary for the Provost to absent himself. Professor Kingston expressed the view that, since the Provost had been charged with reimagining Orientation, it would seem more appropriate for any proposal regarding a change to the make-up and charge of the Orientation Committee to have come from Provost Uvin. Professor McGeoch agreed, while noting that the Orientation Committee’s proposal does not seem to speak to the essential issue. The proposal suggests that the Orientation Committee’s view is that the committee should have determinative authority over Orientation. Professor McGeoch said that it is his understanding that the role of the Orientation Committee has been and should be advisory. The other members shared this

view. The proposal also assumes that the College will create the new position of Orientation Coordinator, it was noted. President Martin commented that, while a position may be created to support Orientation, no decision has been made on that front, and no discussion has yet taken place about what the nature and responsibilities of such a position might be.

Continuing the discussion, Professors McGeoch and Kingston noted that Provost Uvin's working group has not yet reported about its recommendations regarding Orientation. Provost Uvin noted that the group had disbanded in January. Professor McGeoch asked if the group had done a report on its work. Provost Uvin said that he has discussed the group's findings and recommendations with the Orientation Committee over the course of its last six meetings. He informed the members that his group had met all of his goals for reimagining Orientation, with the exception of shortening it. If the program were to be shortened, it would be best to shorten it by at least two days. Since there is a three-day program of off-campus trips in the middle of Orientation, the working group found it difficult to shorten the schedule from five-and-a-half to three-and-a-half days, even if that might be desirable. Professor Kingston asked if Orientation might be shortened and programming continued throughout the semester. Provost Uvin noted that, once students are involved in classes and settle in, it is more difficult to keep their attention, and it is harder for Orientation programming to have an impact.

Conversation turned to the implementation of the 2014-2015 Orientation. Provost Uvin informed the members that the College has engaged a former member of the Dean of Students staff, who has played a major role in coordinating Orientation previously, to support the program. Dean O'Hara, and then her successor, the incoming Dean of New Students, will continue to serve as the chair of the Orientation Committee and will hopefully be able to take up this task before the formal start of his or her appointment on July 1. The Committee expressed the view that the advisory role of the Orientation Committee should be stressed. The committee should not be responsible for implementing Orientation. The members expressed a preference for offering clarity in the revised charge of the Orientation Committee on this front, indicating that the committee advises the Office of Student Affairs, particularly since it has become clear that responsibility for implementing Orientation should not rest with the Dean of New Students alone and because the committee should not be advisory to its own chair. The members agreed that planning and administering Orientation should be the responsibility of the staff of the Office of Student Affairs, who will have the experience, expertise, energy, and time to carry out the program. Since the nature of the expertise needed on the Orientation Committee may change over time, the Committee felt that, rather than naming the Area Coordinator for the First-Year Experience, the Sexual Respect Educator or designee, the Orientation Coordinator, and the Dean of Residential life or designee, as the current Orientation Committee has proposed, the charge should be less specific in regard to naming titles of staff who will serve on the Orientation Committee in order to have more flexibility as needs change. Noting the language in the Orientation Committee's proposal that, "The four students should represent the broad experience of students at the College and include the two senators elected from Student Government and two other students," Professor Corrales expressed the view that either the process for assessing "broad experience" should be made more explicit or this reference should be removed. The members agreed that it would be preferable to have a mixed model for selecting students, much like the one used for the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid, with two chosen by the Association of Amherst Students and two chosen by the Office of Student Affairs. The charge could say simply "four students (two students elected by the student government and two other students)." The charge should also convey that the committee will have four members of the Office of Student Affairs, including the Dean of New Students, ex officio, who serves as the

committee's chair; two other members of the faculty; and the Provost or his or her representative. The Committee clarified that the term *ex officio* means "by virtue of an office" and does not mean "without vote," as is sometimes assumed. The members decided that, since responsibility for issues surrounding diversity rests in the Provost's office, it is important that the Provost or a representative from the Provost's office serve on the Orientation Committee. Professor Harms noted that having four faculty members (including the Dean of New Students and the Provost) serve on the Orientation Committee will ensure that the Faculty's academic interests will be represented.

Concluding the conversation, the members concurred that the Orientation Committee should approach its work through broad consultation, drawing on the expertise of members of the Amherst College community and being as inclusive as possible. The role of the committee should be to help develop and review the vision, policies, and programming of Orientation, giving special attention to academic, social, and regulatory expectations for this experience. Based on views expressed by the members of the Committee of Six during their conversation, it was agreed that the language proposed by the Orientation Committee should be revised and then discussed further. The members agreed that, in advance of bringing a revised charge before the Faculty, they would communicate with the Orientation Committee about the new language.

The members continued their conversation about attendance and voting at Faculty Meetings and reviewed the current rules. The Committee discussed the challenges of establishing criteria for attendance and voting, as well as the sensitivity surrounding changes that would result in excluding anyone who may feel that they have the responsibility to attend Faculty Meetings now. It was agreed that Faculty Meetings have gradually developed into something akin to community meetings, with many attendees (largely administrators) present without voice or vote. Since the primary purpose of the meetings is participatory and legislative, and not simply informational, the members decided that it would be helpful to review which members of the community can vote under the current system, to consider if changes are needed, and perhaps to shift to a system in which only those who are authorized to vote, and a very small number of senior administrators, will attend Faculty Meetings. In this way, the members agreed, the focus of Faculty Meetings, which should be faculty governance, would be clarified, and the body present would more accurately and effectively reflect the purpose of the meetings. The Committee, the President, and the Dean also welcomed the Faculty's practice of discussing and offering opinion at Faculty Meeting about significant College matters that may be outside its direct purview, and, in this way, playing an important advisory role to the administration on these questions. The members stressed that there is great value in having gatherings of faculty, students, and staff of the College and agreed that structures should be put in place to do so. One thought might be to have community meetings at the beginning and end of each academic year. The Committee agreed that any change to the existing practice required further thought and discussion, and suggested returning to the topic in the future.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty