

The twentieth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2021–2022 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, March 7, 2022. Present via Zoom, in addition to the president, were Professors Clotfelter, Manion, Martini, Schroeder Rodríguez, Umphrey, and Vaughan; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with “Questions from Committee Members.” Professor Schroeder Rodríguez expressed appreciation for [the president’s email to the community](#) about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, commenting on how much the communication had resonated with students with whom he had spoken. President Martin said that she has been in regular contact with students at the college who have ties to Ukraine, and that Amherst has been offering whatever support it can. She thanked Hannah Bliss, director of immigration and visa services, for all the help that she has been providing to the students. President Martin commented that Amherst students with ties to Russia have also been experiencing a good deal of distress, and that the college has been supporting them as well. On a related note, Professor Vaughan praised the faculty panels that have been held on the situation in Ukraine, commenting on how informative they have been; he thanked President Martin for supporting these opportunities. The president expressed her appreciation to the faculty who have organized the panels. She noted that another virtual discussion of the horrific events of the last week, and how the invasion may affect Europe, NATO, and the world, would be held at 7:00 P.M. today, and that this webinar already had 1,200 registrants. Professors Glebov, Mattiacci, and Taubman and Samuel Charap ’02, senior political scientist at RAND Corporation, will be participating, she noted, and Professor Kunichika will moderate the discussion.

Noting the current spike in COVID-19 cases among students, Professor Vaughan next thanked Provost Epstein for once again sharing information via email with the faculty about the implications for teaching and learning when students are in isolation. He stressed the importance of continuing to inform colleagues about how best to support students during this difficult time. President Martin commented that COVID cases have been declining, fortunately, and noted that the past several weeks have been difficult. On a related note, Professor Clotfelter, on behalf of a number of science faculty members, said that they want to raise awareness about the challenges of mounting lab courses when labs need to be staged for students who cannot be present because they are in isolation.

On behalf of some other colleagues, Professor Clotfelter next asked if the college has plans to reevaluate the grant-in-aid program. He commented that many peer institutions have far more generous tuition benefits. Provost Epstein responded that the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) examined this issue a couple of years ago and set the goal of moving to a tuition benefit that is equivalent to 30 percent of Amherst’s tuition. Achieving this goal, it had been agreed, would be done gradually over a seven-year period. Currently, the college is in the middle of the time span for these increases. Colleagues are welcome to send a letter to the CPR about the grant-in-aid program if they wish, she noted.

Conversation returned to the draft charge that the committee is preparing for the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) as a three-year pilot, for consideration by the faculty; the members agreed that the draft was almost complete. Refining the members’ charge for this proposed body prompted further consideration of several issues that the committee had discussed on February 28, most notably the makeup of the committee, whether to have faculty members chair the FEC and if so for what term, and the selection process for its membership.

Discussion turned first to whether a faculty member should chair the FEC. After discussing models such as having a colleague chair for a semester or for two years, the members decided to propose that a faculty chair serve for one year. Most members felt that the members of the FEC should elect their chair, rather than having the faculty elect the chair, and felt that it would be important for the chair to be able to begin work over the summer, so as to organize the agenda and other work and to serve as a point of contact for faculty members and other committees. Over time, ideally, the chair should be someone who had served on the FEC the previous year. Most members agreed that pre-tenure faculty members should not chair the committee. The committee agreed to continue to discuss the matter.

Reiterating the view that one of the FEC’s responsibilities should be to follow up on policies and recommendations approved by the faculty, the members noted that it would be most useful to be able to draw on data when evaluating progress and outcomes of such changes. As a more general matter, President Martin commented on the need to have more staffing to support the institutional research

function at the college, noting the importance of data-driven decision-making. All agreed that the FEC should also serve as a sounding board for the faculty and should encourage a free flow of communication and information between the faculty and the administration, representing the interests of all faculty and the college as a whole. For this reason, the members agreed that a tenure-track faculty member should serve on the FEC.

In reviewing the functions of the Committee of Six, most of which the FEC would carry out under the proposed model (with the exception of faculty personnel processes), the committee discussed whether the members of the committee should continue to read all theses recommended for summa cum laude honors, and theses recommended for summa cum laude honors that would drop down to magna cum laude, if the student is not in the top 25 percent of the class, but is in the top 40 percent. The committee agreed that, while the members should not read the theses, they should continue to review departmental recommendations for summa. In this way, there would continue to be a vetting of honors work beyond the departmental level.

Conversation turned to the process of selecting the members of the FEC. The members discussed again the exemptions that are currently in place when the ballot for the Committee of Six is created each year. At present, exemptions are granted for a number of reasons, including for current and past service on some major faculty committees ([See Faculty Handbook IV.1., S., a.](#)). The idea of increasing the number of available faculty by changing some of the exemptions was considered once again. A guiding principle, it was agreed, should be finding ways to distribute committee service among more faculty, instead of having the same small group of faculty assume leadership roles. The committee discussed whether pre-tenure colleagues should be “protected” from college-wide service; most members questioned whether this approach would be in pre-tenure colleagues’ best interest. On the other hand, since the goal of current plans to restructure committee service is to lessen committee service burdens for faculty, fewer colleagues would be involved in college-wide committee service in any given year, if restructuring goes forward. The question of which ballot exemptions should continue was left unresolved, and the members agreed to continue discussion of this point. The committee continued to feel that, for the next year, it could be beneficial for current members of the Committee of Six to serve on either the FEC or the Tenure and Promotion Committee, for the sake of continuity.

The committee then discussed the selection process for membership on the FEC. After some discussion of the elect/select model, under which a group of faculty that would exceed the number needed in a given year would be elected by the faculty, from which the FEC would select a subset to serve, the members agreed to propose retaining the current Committee of Six election structure. It seemed to the members that the elect/select model could produce some distrust of the process, perhaps, and that a direct election process that would represent the will of the majority and be more transparent makes the most sense. The committee also considered whether a single slot on the FEC should be reserved for a pre-tenure faculty member and whether a system should be adopted under which all pre-tenure faculty members should appear on the ballot, or whether they should be allowed to opt in or opt out of being on the ballot. Some members preferred an opt-in approach, while others liked the idea of one that would allow pre-tenure faculty to opt out of being on the ballot. It was agreed that faculty in their first year at the college should not be on the ballot, and some consideration was given to including only pre-tenure faculty who have been reappointed. Some members felt that the college has a tendency to overprotect pre-tenure colleagues and that it would be helpful for them to serve and to be given the opportunity to think about the college broadly. In the end, the members decided to propose that a slot be reserved for a pre-tenure faculty member who would serve a one-year term, which would reduce the burden of service on the FEC for the individual. While faculty members in their first year would not be on the ballot, all others would be, under the members’ proposal. If service on the FEC would present a significant hardship for a pre-tenure faculty member, that individual could speak with the provost about being removed from the ballot. This option exists now, Provost Epstein noted, and she has received virtually no requests to be removed from the Committee of Six ballot.

Concluding the discussion, the members decided that if the pre-tenure faculty member rotates off the FEC each year, the ideal membership of the FEC would be three tenured members (who would serve two-years terms, though their service could be interrupted by leaves) and one pre-tenure faculty member,

who would serve a one-year term. While some felt that continuity could be a problem, others felt that having more faculty circulating through leadership positions is beneficial. In addition, it was noted that members could choose to delay their sabbaticals if they wished. While the administration will make the final decision regarding course releases, the members presented a number of options. Provost Epstein, who noted the expense to the institution of course release and the burden it places on other faculty to teach larger classes, said that she and the president would consider the possibilities, and that the new president may also weigh in. Professor Clotfelter suggested that there be strict limits on the number of meetings of the FEC, which would be expected to meet biweekly and to have shorter meetings than is currently the case for the Committee of Six. He also said that it would be important to have continuity administratively and expressed hope that Associate Provost Tobin would support the work of the FEC. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty