

The thirtieth 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 8, 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.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Martin shared with the members plans to announce that, beginning in April, the college will relax some of the restrictions that have been in place for those on campus due to the pandemic. Based on public health guidance and experts’ advice, Amherst is developing more recreational, arts, music, and athletics opportunities for students on campus (engaging students who are studying remotely whenever possible). All opportunities will be limited to those that allow for necessary safety protocols, President Martin said. She anticipates that students will be allowed to travel off campus for organized activities—out of doors and without crowds—with a staff or faculty member; members of club sports that are not high-contact will be allowed to practice and play on campus only; and that an outdoor stage will be set up to allow for different kinds of performances that follow health and safety guidelines. In addition, President Martin said that, following the [decision of the NESCAC presidents](#), spring athletics competition will be allowed for an abbreviated season and with strict health and safety protocols in place (for more details, see [President Martin’s email of March 9, 2021](#)). The members were pleased that students will be able to take advantage of these opportunities.

Provost Epstein next informed the committee that the Faculty Lecture Committee has selected Yael Rice, assistant professor of art and the history of art and of Asian languages and civilizations, as the 2020–2021 Lazerowitz Lecturer. A member of the Amherst faculty below the rank of full professor is selected annually for this appointment, the provost noted. The lecture, titled “Books that Bind: The Persianate Album and Its Widespread Circulation,” will take place on Tuesday, April 6, from 4 P.M. to 5 P.M. The members then [reviewed a note to the Committee of Six from Professor Hall, chair of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid](#), in which he informed the members of the college’s plans to continue its standardized test-optional policy through the 2025 admission cycle. A comprehensive assessment at the end of this three-year pilot period will inform Amherst’s approach to the use of standardized tests going forward, Professor Hall noted in his correspondence.

Turning to another topic, the provost noted that it is clear that the pandemic has caused significant setbacks for some colleagues’ scholarly and creative trajectories. She asked the members for their views about the idea of extending by an additional year the tenure clocks of all tenure-track professors who began their positions during or prior to the 2020–2021 academic year. The provost noted that she and President Martin support taking this step. The members agreed that it is appropriate to do so. Provost Epstein said that these extensions would be in addition to the initial one-year extension granted to all tenure-track professors, as well as any parental leave extensions that might also apply. As has been stressed earlier, the decision about whether or not to extend a tenure clock will have no bearing on tenure decisions. The provost said that, for faculty members who have taught for three years following reappointment and choose to delay standing for tenure, a one-semester sabbatical will be permitted prior to the tenure decision. Post-tenure, however, individuals would then receive a one-semester leave, until they accumulate enough teaching semesters to earn another semester of sabbatical. In addition, Provost Epstein explained, following a positive tenure decision, colleagues who choose to extend their tenure clocks due to COVID-19 will receive a promotion raise that will keep their salaries in line with those of their original cohort. On behalf of the faculty, the committee expressed appreciation for the college’s willingness to grant this additional extension under these extraordinary circumstances.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Umphrey wondered how the use of this option might affect the number of colleagues standing for tenure in upcoming years and sabbatical schedules. She suggested that projections be developed to inform planning efforts on behalf of future Committees of Six. Provost Epstein responded that, due to extensions of tenure clocks that may result from one or multiple parental leaves and/or COVID-19, some tenure-track faculty could stand for tenure in a number of different years. For this reason, it may be challenging to develop projections, but she said that her office would explore

the viability of doing so. In regard to reappointment, the provost said that she has encouraged tenure-track faculty to stand for reappointment according to their regular clocks, thus ensuring that they have a full-year of sabbatical on the regular timetable. Colleagues may choose to delay reappointment if they wish, however, and she would be open to being flexible about sabbatical options, with some limitations, as noted above. Professor Kingston asked if new tenure-track faculty who begin their careers at Amherst on July 1, 2021, will have an extra year added to their agreed upon clocks. Some members noted that, if the extension is not extended to new hires, these colleagues could potentially stand for tenure before some faculty who were hired before them. Provost Epstein said that this happens already, due to parental leaves. She feels that it would be premature to adjust the tenure clocks of new hires now, but said that she would be open to considering doing so in the fall. Professor Trapani asked if the standards by which tenure candidates' scholarship will be judged will be changed, due to the impact of the pandemic, given the two-year extension of tenure clocks for tenure-track faculty. Provost Epstein responded that candidates should seek to achieve the level of scholarly accomplishment that they had anticipated prior to the pandemic. Professor Trapani noted the importance of candidates and departments conveying to external reviewers the unique circumstances that may have resulted in an individual's loss of productivity, due to the pandemic, for example Amherst's need to shut down labs and to have staff move to remote work. Other institutions, for example R1 universities, may not have taken these steps, and the reviewers should be aware of what occurred at Amherst.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Trapani asked why, under [the proposed course schedule](#), 8:30 A.M. classes could start any time between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M. Provost Epstein noted that this is fine because a 50-minute class will not overlap with another block so long as it starts between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M. It was noted that 50-minute classes that start at 9:00 A.M. will show that start time in the catalog, for example.

The members next reviewed proposals for senior sabbatical fellowships. Following a brief discussion, the committee voted to forward them to the board of trustees for ratification.

Conversation turned to a draft faculty meeting agenda for a March 16 faculty meeting. The members discussed again the Committee on Educational Policy's proposal that the college discontinue use of the current 14-point grading scale and adopt a 4.33 grading scale. The members continued to have some of their previously expressed concerns about aspects of the proposal (see [the Committee of Six minutes of March 1, 2021](#)), including some implications of retaining the grade of A-plus—unless its numerical value is changed to 4.00. The members then voted on the motions on the agenda, approving them unanimously and voting unanimously to forward them to the faculty. They then voted unanimously to forward the faculty meeting agenda to the faculty.

Professor del Moral asked if, prior to bringing the GPA motion forward, the committee could consult with Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, about some of the issues that had been raised. The provost's office consulted with J. Barba immediately after the Committee of Six meeting and then informed the members via email that it seemed best not to bring the GPA motion forward until some of the committee's questions could be addressed. J. Barba agreed to meet with the committee for this purpose. No member responded with any objection, and the motion was removed from the agenda.

The meeting concluded with a discussion about how the committee might move forward with developing a proposal this spring to clarify the criteria for tenure ([Faculty Handbook, III., E., 3. and 4.](#)) at the college. Some members favored using as a starting point a proposal finalized by past Committee of Six members in 2019, and the idea of meeting with some of these colleagues to learn about their reasoning was discussed. Some members felt that the committee should start this work anew. After some discussion of whether the relative importance of teaching, scholarship, and service should be made more explicit and whether new areas (e.g., advising and summer research students) should be incorporated into the evaluation at the time of tenure, the members did not reach a conclusion. Some members felt that the college should become more transparent about the expectations that must be met to receive tenure.

President Martin commented that, in undertaking this work, it might be helpful to review the tenure criteria of some peer institutions, as the previous Committees of Six had done. She also expressed the view that it would be desirable for departments to be more explicit about expectations within their disciplines for tenure. Since these expectations vary, only so much can be done in this regard at the institutional level, in her view. The members agreed to return to this subject at an upcoming meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty