

The thirty-eighth 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, May 17, 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 a personnel matter. Discussion then turned once again to the process of considering committee assignments. After finalizing a list of nominees for each committee, the members agreed that the provost should extend invitations to these colleagues to serve. Some members commented that, in the future, it would be helpful for the committee to have more information about each faculty member's service responsibilities and activities—for example, whether individuals are chairing departments or contributing to programs outside the departments—so that these contributions can be taken into account when proposing committee assignments. The provost said that developing better ways for faculty members to document their college service is one of the issues that consultant Susan Pierce has been asked to consider. One suggestion is to have faculty share information about their activities in an annual report to the provost.

The committee next discussed nominations for the Jeffrey B. Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize and selected Danielle Benedetto, senior lecturer in mathematics, as this year's recipient. The members noted that D. Benedetto is an outstanding teacher, advisor, and mentor who has made important contributions to the curriculum and has had a significant impact on hundreds of students—many of whom are first-generation and/or low-income students and women—whom she has guided and inspired to pursue studies in STEM. It was agreed that the president would announce the selection of D. Benedetto at the faculty meeting the next day. The committee noted that, in the solicitation for nominations for the prize next year, it should be noted once again that it is permitted to re-nominate faculty whom an individual has nominated before, and that nominations from prior years are considered by the Committee of Six annually. Professor Trapani suggested that future solicitations could encourage recommenders to save their entries offline for resubmission in future years.

Conversation turned to a draft of a survey that the provost intends to send to all tenure-track faculty members at the college, with the goal of learning more about challenges assistant professors have faced during the pandemic, and informing the ways in which the college can continue to support pre-tenure colleagues. The committee recommended some revisions to the document, and the provost said that, after incorporating the members' changes, she would next seek feedback from the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty about the survey. Professor Trapani asked whether, on the survey, there should be attention given to, or a question regarding, the pandemic's impact on mental health. It was agreed to return to this question at the following meeting. Plans call for administering the instrument in early June, Provost Epstein noted.

The members next discussed [a letter from some members of the college community](#) requesting that all faculty and staff be required to provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination before being permitted to continue or return to work on campus in the summer or fall of 2021. The committee expressed support for taking this step. President Martin and Provost Epstein said that the college plans to require all faculty and staff to be fully vaccinated by August 1. A process will be put in place to request a medical or religious exemption, they explained. Soon after the meeting ended the president sent [an email to the community about plans for on-campus work](#), which included information about the requirement that all faculty and staff be fully vaccinated by August 1 (the same requirement is already in place for students).

The meeting ended with a discussion about clarifying the criteria for tenure, a topic that has been on the agenda of the Committee of Six for a number of years, without significant progress being made. Provost Epstein and Associate Provost Tobin shared what they had learned from a conversation that they had had with a colleague at a peer institution. As had been shared with the committee during earlier discussions about this issue, the school uses a system that combines the articulation of a broad set of college-wide criteria for tenure—with that language continuing to be part of the *Faculty*

*Handbook*—and complementary departmental expectations for tenure. The committee expressed support for adopting this system at Amherst. As a first step, it was decided to move forward now with drafting some revisions to Amherst’s current *Faculty Handbook* language about the criteria for tenure (*Faculty Handbook*, III., E., 3.), with the goal of enhancing clarity and achieving greater alignment with practice. It was noted that any proposal that the committee recommends will be considered in the next academic year. Professor Umphrey agreed that, by the time of the committee’s next meeting, she would draft some new *Faculty Handbook* language for the members’ consideration.

In addition, the members decided that it would be informative and useful for each department to undertake the exercise of clarifying its standards for tenure in regard to scholarship and creative work, teaching, and service, and to include their expectations in their departmental handbooks, provide them to prospective faculty members, share them with external reviewers, and the Committee of Six at the time of tenure, and make them publicly available. The committee noted that, in regard to the Committee of Six, specifically, having more information about the expectations of departments and fields will be another helpful way of putting departmental recommendations and the evaluations of outside reviewers in context, and of ensuring consistency in the evaluation process over time and across different Committees of Six. The provost said that she would speak with chairs of academic departments and programs in the fall about moving forward with this approach, which would be informed by departments’ knowledge of the expectations and standards of their fields. The members noted that it will be important to make it clear that, while any departmental expectations surrounding tenure will provide helpful information to all involved in faculty personnel processes, it is the institutional standards for tenure that will remain paramount. The committee agreed that communication between departments and the Committee of Six would be important, in order to align expectations between the two groups, and that, to ensure consistency with college-wide criteria, departmental tenure standards should be reviewed and approved by the Committee of Six prior to being posted. All agreed that the emphasis of all of the work that will be undertaken surrounding clarifying tenure expectations and criteria will focus on codifying current standards and policy, rather than developing new policies and expectations.

The members also agreed to begin a discussion about ways to align the *Faculty Handbook* language about reappointment with practice.

The meeting adjourned at 4:33 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty