

The twenty-ninth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2019–2020 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, May 18, 2020. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors Basu, Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with a brief discussion of plans and protocols for returning Amherst's science faculty to their labs, as allowed under Governor Baker's reopening plan during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had just been announced. Provost Epstein said that she and Associate Provost and Associate Dean of the Faculty Cheney would soon be meeting with members of the Science Faculty Steering Committee to develop college protocols and a timeline for returning to labs. She noted that only a limited number of individuals will be allowed in the science center at one time, and that many procedures will be put in place to mitigate risk to the degree possible. Professor Goutte, who noted that the scientists are excited and eager to return to their labs, asked how science faculty will interface with colleagues in facilities as part of planning efforts. The provost said that she would invite Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations; John Carter, chief of police and director of public safety; and Jess Martin, administrative director of the science center, to be part of the upcoming meeting that she had just mentioned and to address this question and other matters. The president and provost emphasized that, while the governor's announcement of a phased reopening is hopeful and will allow plans to move forward to begin to bring some members of the college community back to campus, Amherst will be taking a careful and gradual approach to doing so. President Martin said that she had recently had a productive conversation with the newly established student advisory committee about the conditions that would be necessary to bring some students back to campus, both in summer and fall. The students had brought forward some interesting and creative ideas, she noted.

Conversation returned to the question of ensuring Committee of Six representation on the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. Several members said that they understand from their conversations with Norm Jones, chief diversity and inclusion officer, that he would prefer to have a member of the current Committee of Six, as well as an incoming member, join the task force as soon as is practicable. The current member could step down from the task force upon completing service on the Committee of Six, and the incoming member could then remain. The committee suggested that the president and provost consult with N. Jones about his preferences in regard to this matter, and they agreed to do so.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Sims, who had written to the members ahead of the meeting about this subject, noted that a number of faculty members had asked her to share their concern that the membership of the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Academic Structures during COVID-19 (ASC) does not include a colleague who has young children. These colleagues feel that those who have not been in a primary caretaking role for the past two months will find it very difficult to understand fully the pressures that faculty with young children are experiencing. Primary among these pressures is the need to parent and homeschool their children during working hours, at the same time they need to meet the college's standards and expectations for the faculty's work.

In responding, Provost Epstein and Professor Basu reviewed briefly the ongoing work of the (ASC), including plans to meet with the group of faculty and staff who had brought forward ideas for supporting colleagues who have assumed significant caretaking roles due to the pandemic. It is clear that this will be a significant issue going forward, for which solutions must be found, the ASC recognizes, the provost noted. Professor Sims responded that these colleagues are aware that the ASC has scheduled a meeting with the group mentioned above. They feel, however, that a one-time listening session is not a substitute for having a faculty member who is experiencing these challenges serve on the ASC and bring that perspective to the ad hoc committee's work.

Continuing, Professor Sims recalled that the Committee of Six had discussed the idea of appointing a colleague with young children to the ASC, but had decided that doing so did not seem feasible because of the additional time pressures that would be imposed on members of the ASC during the busy weeks at the end of the semester. In light of caregivers' questions, and with grading almost done, Professor Sims asked whether consideration should be given to adding a faculty member with young children to the ASC at this point. She wonders whether the needs of caregivers are being considered as the ASC develops proposals for different scenarios. For instance, she had understood that, if daycare facilities and schools do not open in the fall, it may

be necessary for some colleagues to take a voluntary furlough (reducing their course load and being compensated at a reduced level), in order to fulfill their responsibilities as primary caregivers. Professor Sims said that she cannot envision how this arrangement would be possible under the seven-week “Beloit model,” given that individuals’ teaching loads during those seven weeks could not be reduced. She asked how parents could handle this situation, given that many faculty members will not be able to work full-time hours, if schools and daycare facilities remain closed. Professor Sims said that she fears that the result would be reduced office hours, less meaningful feedback, and/or less synchronous class time—all of the opportunities that students need most.

Provost Epstein informed the committee that the ASC will be considering the issues that Professor Sims had described as part of its evaluation of potential models for the next academic year. The meeting with the group described above represents the beginning of the ASC’s effort to gather information and consider ideas to support caregivers of young children and others, for example elderly family members. She expressed the view that it would be challenging to add a new member to the ASC at this stage, since work has been under way and various meetings have already occurred. Professor Basu, a member of the ASC, agreed, while noting that she would be happy to share information about the upcoming discussion, as well as the ASC’s ongoing deliberations about this issue, with Professor Sims, who could then convey what she learns to others. The ASC would then consider caregivers’ feedback. The provost and Professor Basu said that, even though they themselves are not in the role of primary caregiver, they and the other members of the ASC recognize the importance of this issue. Professor Sims said she is primarily concerned that this issue is addressed and thanked Provost Epstein and Professor Basu, as well as the other members of the ASC, for their work on colleagues’ behalf.

Continuing with questions, Professor Basu asked if there is a venue for staff members to bring forward ideas about academic matters. She is aware that some academic department coordinator (ADC)s have developed some proposals. Provost Epstein said that the ASC will meet with the academic resource team, which comprises staff that support teaching and learning, through the library and information technology, for example. The provost commented that ADCs are welcome to be in touch with their department chairs or with the ASC directly with any ideas that they would like to share.

The committee next reviewed the nomination from the Department of Physical Education and Athletics for the Edward Hitchcock Fellowship and voted unanimously to support awarding of the fellowship to the nominee and to forward the nomination to the faculty. Professor Horton suggested that the college adopt a practice of vetting candidates for “Green Dean” positions, with the goal of learning whether students who are applying have engaged in conduct unbecoming an Amherst student and/or have disciplinary infractions listed on their records. Provost Epstein agreed to speak with Maria-Judith Rodriguez, chief human resources officer, about this idea, while noting that any disciplinary infractions would be reviewed, but would not necessarily disqualify candidates, depending on the nature of the infraction and students’ overall record at the college.

At 3:00 P.M., the incoming members of the Committee of Six (Professors del Moral, Kingston, Leise, Manion, Trapani, and Umphrey) joined the meeting via Zoom. The members of both committees had agreed that it would be useful to have a discussion about agenda items that will carry over to this summer or next year, or which time and present circumstances have not permitted the current committee to address. A good deal of the conversation focused on the committee’s meetings with the student leadership of the Black Student Union (BSU), the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion, and members of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), which the current members felt had been productive and informative. As the current Committee of Six members explained, these conversations had prompted them to organize a listening session as part of the agenda for the May 21 faculty meeting.

Professor Basu reiterated her view that some of the topics that the committee had hoped to address seem even more crucial in light of the pandemic. These include the unequal service burdens across the faculty, with respect to different fields and identity groups, and academic advising and mentoring, which increasingly includes students’ well-being, as well as academic concerns, during this time. Professor Basu said that it is her hope that the committee will consider the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee’s proposals surrounding advising and for a required sophomore seminar. The members

noted that other topics include the following: clarifying the criteria for tenure, and related consideration of adjustments that might be made due to the impact of the pandemic on the trajectory of untenured faculty members' scholarship and teaching; evaluating recommendations that are set to come forward about the college's housing program; thinking about issues surrounding campus planning; considering last year's proposal from the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) that the faculty elect the membership of the FCAFA (mimicking the process used for the Committee on Educational Policy and a small number of other faculty committees), rather than having the Committee of Six appoint the members; clarifying the criteria for promotion to full professor; and considering the provost's proposal to expand the responsibilities of the faculty athletics representative (FAR). Provost Epstein commented that the ASC will make recommendations about possible ways to address the impact of the pandemic on untenured faculty.

In regard to the FAR, Professor Horton suggested that it would be beneficial for the FAR, in carrying out the responsibilities of the position, to be connected with college diversity and inclusion efforts. In regard to the topic of intensive-writing courses at the college, Professor Brooks commented that the English department plans to consider the idea of having a lecturer housed in the department teaching such courses. Professor Horton suggested that it would be useful for the new Committee of Six to discuss with the president and provost the ways in which the committee conducts its work, for example how questions raised by the faculty are brought forward and considered, and the members' dual role as a sounding board for ideas that are being developed by the college and as the faculty's elected representatives. In regard to the FCAFA, Professor Sims noted that a goal of the proposal to elect the membership, as she understands it, is to ensure that senior, experienced faculty members are appointed to that committee. Professor Basu noted the importance of having the outgoing Committee of Six share its observations about these and other topics with the incoming members. In this way, there will be continuity, rather than idiosyncrasy, surrounding the Committee of Six's work. This is particularly true regarding the perceptions and concerns of tenure-track faculty, which have been shared with the committee on a number of occasions this year, both through conversations with the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty and at a meeting that was open to all tenure-track colleagues. Professor Brooks commented that, at the committee's most recent meeting with tenure-track faculty, colleagues asked that ways be found to ensure that the Committee of Six will factor in the impact of the pandemic when evaluating tenure cases in the years to come, particularly after the pandemic is over.

The members also stressed the importance of continuing the committee's efforts to support diversity and inclusion on campus, including supporting steps that are aimed at addressing racism on campus. The members' efforts have also been focused on educating themselves and raising awareness about issues of racism and bias at the college. They have learned of the work of the Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion to develop bias protocols and restorative practices. They have heard from both members of the ODI and leaders of the BSU about the progress that has been made, and steps that still need to be taken, to address racism on campus and build a more inclusive and equitable community. It is expected that bias reporting in a classroom setting and implementing restorative practices will come forward in the next academic year, it was noted, though restorative practices will begin this summer for the lacrosse team, as well as for coaches and administrators within athletics. The members noted that N. Jones has asked that both a current member and incoming member of the Committee of Six serve on the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion, in this way building continuity and a strong connection to the committee. Professor Brooks commented that she has learned a great deal from the committee's meetings with the task force, members of the ODI, and the leadership of the BSU, and from reviewing related materials. The members urged the incoming members to engage the faculty in a discussion of the intersection of hateful and harassing speech and the college's [Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#). This spring, the current committee has been laying the groundwork for such a conversation, the members noted. Professor Goutte commented on the importance of communication in the committee's work, stressing the value of the committee's meetings with the BSU leadership, members of the ODI, and members of the Presidential Task Force for Diversity and Inclusion; she hopes that such opportunities for communication will continue to be sought.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Umphrey asked if the incoming committee can be provided with the materials from internal and external bodies that the current committee has reviewed, as well as minutes of the conversation that the committee had with the presidential task force. President Martin said that N. Jones will provide the various reports and that she would share her notes of the meetings that she has had with the student leaders of the BSU. Provost Epstein said that she would forward the informal minutes that had been taken of the meeting with the task force, which were taken by Heather Ruggeri, assistant to the chief diversity and inclusion officer. Members of the Committee of Six also offered to share their informal notes on these meetings with incoming members.

President Martin informed the incoming members that the issues that the administration can address are in process, and that timelines have been communicated to the students; issues of speech and expression must be addressed by the faculty, the president said. As has been noted previously, according to the student leaders of the BSU, practices surrounding reporting racist incidents are informal, and many students do not know when or how to go through more formal channels that may be in place or how they will know if any action has been taken. In response to the students' request to revise the [Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#), the president said that she has informed them that the faculty developed this statement and must approve any changes to it. In addition, any bias-reporting system or educational effort that extends to the classroom setting is also within the purview of the faculty, she noted, and will be considered separately from the student-to-student reporting system. The current Committee of Six encouraged the new members to hold a meeting with the student-leaders of the BSU, as they have found it to be compelling and informative to hear from the students directly about their experiences with racism on campus. It was noted that, in addition to involving the Committee of Six, the College Council will review the proposed bias-reporting system.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Kingston commented that he is not familiar with restorative practices. Professor Brooks acknowledged that much about restorative practices was new to many faculty, including members of the committee, and that the members have been learning about this approach. This was one of the motivations for asking Professor Hart to share information about restorative practices, including resources, at the upcoming faculty meeting. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the ODI to provide resources to the faculty about restorative practice. Professor Schmalzbauer commented that Professor Hart, who has been spearheading efforts to pilot this approach at the college, is in the process of creating a brochure on this topic.

Professor Umphrey next asked to whom the ASC will be making its recommendations. Provost Epstein explained that recommendations that are within the purview of the faculty will be brought to the faculty, while other recommendations will focus on matters that are within the purview of the administration. In the case of the latter, the president and provost will consult with the Committee of Six, whenever possible. Due to the complexities of the issues involved and the time pressures that the college will face, it will be essential for this consultation to begin to occur over the summer, Provost Epstein noted.

Professor Trapani next asked if there are issues surrounding athletics that will come before the Committee of Six. Provost Epstein said that she does not anticipate immediate issues that will demand the committee's attention at this time, noting that she has been working closely with Don Faulstick, director of athletics; N. Jones; and Professor Hart on issues surrounding athletics that intersect with matters of diversity and inclusion. Professor Trapani asked if issues related to student mental health will be on the committee's agenda. Provost Epstein responded that she does not believe so.

Professor Hart, faculty diversity and inclusion officer, and N. Jones joined the conversation at 4:00 P.M. They reviewed briefly their ongoing work, and their roles in framing the issues that would be the subject of the listening session. N. Jones said that he appreciated the opportunity to have a conversation with the Committee of Six about the work of the ODI and to have this additional discussion. Professor Hart noted that work will continue virtually this summer with restorative practices. He will continue to engage with faculty, as well as holding restorative circles with coaches and administrators. Consultants who have been supporting these efforts will continue to do so through the fall, Professor Hart explained. It is his hope that some faculty will become facilitators after receiving training, and also will form a restorative

practices advisory group. Professor Hart said that he is working on a handbook and resource guide about restorative practices. He noted that the information will be printable and be posted on the web. Learning of Professor Umphrey's request for written materials that had been provided to this year's Committee of Six, N. Jones agreed to send to the incoming members information provided to those who had attended the workshop on restorative practices, as well as the self-study prepared for the External Advisory Committee on Diversity, Inclusion, and Excellence, and the external committee's report. The provost then thanked all of the guests, and they left the meeting at 4:31 P.M.

The meeting concluded with a brief discussion surrounding ways that tenure-track faculty members should begin to document the impact that COVID-19 has had on their scholarship and teaching. The provost noted the example of including on CVs invitations to conferences that ended up being canceled this spring because of the pandemic and articles that journals had accepted for publication, but had later decided not to publish because of COVID-19. Faculty should continue to add to this narrative until the time of tenure, at which time departments, the Committee of Six, and outside reviewers will consider this information. Some members noted that department chairs may struggle with offering feedback about teaching to tenure-track faculty during their annual conversations, given the switch to remote learning and, in some cases, the poor response rate of students, when they were asked to complete evaluations. In addition, it may be difficult to offer guidance about scholarship. Provost Epstein agreed, but noted that the annual conversation is a time when tenured colleagues can develop a better understanding of the particular challenges that the tenure-track colleague is facing because of the pandemic. In addition, the annual conversation should cover the fall semester, she said. In regard to scholarship, the provost noted that the impact of the pandemic varies significantly by field. The college will be taking all this into account going forward, Provost Epstein reiterated. For now, everyone will have to do the best they can.

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty