

The thirtieth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2019–2020 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 3:30 P.M. on Tuesday, May 26, 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 Provost Epstein informing the committee that Professor Brooks has been invited to serve on the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion for the remainder of her term on the Committee of Six, and that she has accepted. The committee thanked Professor Brooks for taking on this additional service.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Horton asked if dates have been set for faculty meetings that will take place in the summer. Provost Epstein responded that she envisions that, in addition to holding a faculty meeting at which the faculty will be asked to vote on some of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Academic Structures during COVID-19 (ASC), potentially as early as June 9, a meeting of departments chairs will also be needed early in June to discuss the guidelines that the ASC will recommend for departments, and college planning for the next academic year. The provost noted that there will also be some meetings to present information about the pedagogical support that will be available to faculty during the summer. She noted that the ASC will not be making a recommendation about any possible adjustments to the grading policy for the next academic year, explaining that that matter will be considered at a later time. The members recommended that the faculty be asked to hold several dates in June for a faculty meeting, so as to aid colleagues’ ability to set aside time in their schedules. Provost Epstein agreed to share some potential dates with the committee following the May 28 faculty meeting.

Continuing with Questions, Professor Goutte asked about the status of the college’s incoming class. Provost Epstein conveyed that, at this time, 489 students have accepted Amherst’s offer of admission. Often there is “melt” over the summer, she explained, with some students changing their college choices. This may be more pronounced this year, due to the pandemic. The college is maintaining a waiting list over the summer, and may admit students from the list, if needed. The target size of the entering class is 473, Provost Epstein said, while noting that there may end up being a smaller number of first-year students, if a significant number of gap years are requested and granted. Continuing, the provost noted that students have until June 1 to submit requests to take a gap year; some first-year students have already done so. In addition, current students may end up making requests to take voluntary leaves, depending on decisions about the format of the fall semester (whether teaching will take place on campus, remotely, or making use of a combination of the two), and the ways in which the pandemic unfolds. President Martin commented on the strength of the incoming class. Professor Horton asked if fewer students are planning to study away in the fall. Provost Epstein said that around sixty students have indicated that they would like to study away in the fall, though it appears unlikely that this will be possible because of the pandemic. While the college has not prohibited study away in the fall, students have been instructed to register for Amherst courses in case study away cannot take place. The committee then turned briefly to a personnel matter.

In anticipation of the faculty meeting on May 28, the members discussed a request to have Zoom Chat enabled during the faculty meeting and decided that, as this function does not replicate a feature of a live faculty meeting, doing so does not seem necessary. All agreed that it would be best to continue to call on faculty members to speak during the meeting via the virtual “raise-hand” function. Colleagues who wish to communicate with one another during the faculty meeting could certainly text or email, it was noted.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of draft recommendations that the ASC will bring forward. Provost Epstein explained that some proposals will require votes of the faculty; others are earmarked for consideration by the Committee of Six. ([The first draft of the ASC’s report](#) was distributed to the faculty the next day.) Professor Basu, a member of the ASC, and Provost Epstein, who is chairing it, shared both the recommendations and the rationales that underlie them. They explained that motions for recommendations that require a faculty vote, including the structure for the academic calendar for the next academic year, will be brought to the faculty in early to mid-June, since planning will need to begin as soon as possible.

Professor Basu began the discussion by turning to the issue of the academic calendar, noting that the ASC had spent a lot of time considering the “Beloit model,” in which faculty teach two seven-and-a-half-week modules over the course of the semester, and in which faculty and students distribute the courses they teach

and take over that time. The ASC had found the model appealing, she said, because it reduces pressures on students and would offer flexibility, should in-person teaching and learning need to be discontinued on campus mid-semester. In the end though, Professor Basu explained, the ASC had rejected the modular system. Many colleagues had told the ASC that the model would not permit the kind of steady increase in competency required, for example, by language learning, or the kind of scaffolding or opportunities for writing and rewriting that are necessary for many courses and for the first-year seminar program, Professor Basu informed the members.

Continuing, Professor Basu said that the ASC had ultimately concluded that it would be impossible to create an academic calendar that included both modules and courses taught over thirteen weeks, a hybrid model that some colleagues had requested. A summer semester had been considered and rejected, she noted, because many colleagues want to reserve their summers for research, and because students are eager to pursue internships. In the end, given the time faculty will need to devote to course preparation, the ASC decided to recommend that the college leave in place the semester system of thirteen weeks of instruction, with a fall and spring semester. Under the ASC's proposal, the start of the academic year would take place late in August, so that course work (exclusive of reading period and examinations) for the fall semester could conclude before Thanksgiving, with the spring semester beginning in February.

In regard to preparing courses over the summer, Provost Epstein noted that the college will provide pedagogical support to help faculty better prepare to teach in the remote and online environment. (Faculty must prepare courses in such a way that could be taught in person, remotely, or as a combination of both formats, she noted.) Colleagues will be encouraged to take advantage of these learning opportunities during the summer hiatus. The provost noted that staff from the Center for Teaching and Learning, as well as other members of the Academic Resource Team, are available to help faculty learn about resources, collaborations, and projects that might enhance or transform existing courses or lead to entirely new partnerships.

Returning to the subject of the academic calendar, Professor Basu said that the ASC will also recommend the adoption of a January term of four weeks, in which students would be able complete a single full course for credit. Teaching during this January term would be optional and would need to be coordinated within each department's staffing plan for the year, Professor Basu noted. Faculty who opt to teach over the January term would receive credit for teaching one of their four courses during the academic year, and would have the option to do so again in January 2022. Faculty who do not teach the first year will also have the option of teaching in the January term in 2022. Professor Basu said that it is anticipated that these courses would be taught remotely. Provost Epstein said that she was excited to learn of the interest that faculty have in teaching during January. In response to the recent faculty survey, more than sixty faculty members responded that they would be interested in teaching in January, and about fifty indicated that they would consider doing so. The idea of teaching interdisciplinary courses on contemporary topics—for example, the impact of the pandemic, was also high. Professor Basu noted that the ASC feels that the January term is a structure that will encourage pedagogical and curricular innovation, flexibility, and creativity. Professor Schmalzbauer expressed enthusiasm for having increased opportunities for faculty to come together to teach interdisciplinary courses. Professor Horton asked if the earlier start date for classes in the fall would align with the academic calendars of other Five-College institutions. Provost Epstein said that she thinks that the earlier schedule should not present problems for students who wish to take classes at the university, Hampshire, or Smith. All such courses would be taken remotely, she noted. The provost said that taking courses at Mount Holyoke would present a challenge, as Mount Holyoke has adopted the Beloit model for the next academic year.

Provost Epstein noted that, under the ASC's proposals, all students would go through a new fall 2020 course-registration process during the summer. Prior to that registration, departments would be asked to take the opportunity to envision their curricula for the full 2020–2021 academic year (fall and spring semesters as well as the January term). Departments will need to have staffing plans in place and send new course proposals to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) by June 19, 2020. Professor Horton asked about the timeline for registration. Provost Epstein said that all departments should know which courses they will offer by the end of June, and that pre-registration will take place in July for all students other than first-years. New students will register in August, with faculty advising students over the summer.

Turning to the next topic, Professor Basu explained that, after hearing from the director of the counseling center and others about the stress that students are experiencing, the ASC decided to recommend that students be permitted and encouraged to take three courses per semester as a regular course load. Those who would do so could graduate with a minimum of thirty courses regardless of what year they graduate (120 federal course credits). Under the proposal, students who want to take four courses per semester would need to receive approval from their advisor and a class dean, following the same procedure currently used to petition for a five-course load. Students who fail courses could take another course during the January term.

President Martin expressed some concern that students would take only three courses per semester, even if teaching and learning takes place on campus next year. If teaching is remote, with all the challenges that accompany this mode—for some students even more than others—she can understand why a reduced course load makes sense. If students are on campus, however, she wonders whether it would be better for them to be engaged fully in their academic work. On a related note, President Martin commented that she has been meeting virtually with the student advisory committee that was constituted recently and has been very impressed with the students' ideas and with the seriousness that they have demonstrated about the need to reduce the risks surrounding the spread of the virus. She has asked the students to help develop a social contract that could be put in place if students return to campus during the pandemic. The students feel that the best approach would be for students to be allowed to have contact with the ten or so students with whom they live, while practicing social distancing from everyone else. They feel that there should be consequences for students who do not comply with the social contract.

Continuing the conversation, President Martin noted that she is more hopeful than she has been in recent months about the possibility of having some or all students come back to campus for the next academic year, and the college's ability to take the steps necessary to reduce the associated risks, to the degree possible. She has more hope than was warranted earlier that testing with rapid turnaround times will be available. In her view, Amherst has a responsibility to provide students with the education that they expected when they chose the college, if at all possible, and she is particularly concerned about the impact of learning remotely on students who have been experiencing serious hardships while away. Professor Basu and Provost Epstein, said that the ASC will consider the president's feedback, while noting that the ASC had developed its recommendations under the assumption that, whether students return to campus next year or not, some courses will need to be taught remotely. Provost Epstein said that classes with enrollments of more than thirty-five students would need to be taught remotely. Professor Basu commented on the challenges of planning for the next academic year in the face of the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic. President Martin agreed that the process is extremely difficult. Professor Basu asked the president if she feels that the ASC should review its recommendations in light of the optimism that some or all students will return to campus for the next academic year. President Martin responded that doing so would be helpful, she thinks.

Continuing with her summary of the ASC's recommendations, Professor Basu turned to the issue of advising. She said that the ASC recognizes that a strong advising system plays a foundational role in student success, particularly during this challenging time, while also being aware that advising during the pandemic poses challenges and burdens for the faculty. She informed the members that the ASC will make a number of recommendations to support students, while also suggesting ways to support faculty, who are facing greater demands on their time as they develop new courses and pedagogies. While doing so, colleagues must also find ways to balance their teaching with research and family responsibilities. Protecting untenured faculty members' time for research is another goal of the ASC's recommendations. With these ideas in mind, Professor Basu said that the ASC will recommend that tenured faculty with fewer than twenty major and college advisees be assigned additional college or major advisees to reduce the demands on colleagues with larger advising loads. The ASC will propose that tenure-track faculty not be assigned additional college advisees, unless they elect to have them, she noted.

Professor Basu said that the ASC will also suggest a few strategies to reduce the burden of advising, including that the department chair or another faculty member serve as point person for the department on advising. This person could hold advising sessions once a month or three times over the course of a semester, for example. Faculty with large advising loads could develop strategies for a combination of group and individual advising sessions. Professor Sims said that she supports the approach of having tenured faculty

assume the burden of advising over the summer so that the research time of untenured faculty can be protected. She asked how much time summer advising is anticipated to take. Provost Epstein said that she anticipates that two of three meetings with advisees could be in a group format, while one could be an individual meeting. So, it would be about twenty hours over the course of the summer. She imagines that advisors would meet with their current advisees once during the first two weeks of July to discuss how the changes for the next academic year would affect students' academic program. Under the ASC's proposal, professors who have a very high number of major advisees, for example, economics, would not receive new college advisees.

Continuing the discussion about advising, Professor Basu noted that the ASC is supportive of the efforts of the Dean of New Students Rick López to plan a robust virtual program for orientation advising in July and August. Doing so is necessary, given the importance of beginning and maintaining contact with new students. Professor Horton suggested that the work of advising could be reduced by making videos in which the answers to commonly asked questions are provided, and that departments might want to make use of this approach for their advisees. Given the number of double and triple majors, and the fact that advisors will pick up sophomores who have declared their majors, Professor Horton asked if the ASC feels that the numbers will allow faculty teaching in the fall to have fewer than twenty college and major advisees. The provost said that she anticipates this to be the case, commenting that departments not only gained sophomore advisees, but no longer have advisees who just graduated.

Turning to the topic of faculty who have become caregivers due to the impact of the pandemic, Professor Basu said that the ASC will recommend that, with the approval of their department and the provost and dean of the faculty, faculty members with caregiving needs could elect to reduce their teaching load by one course if they take a reduction in pay, or if they take on a combination of increased college or department advising responsibilities, student research supervision, special topics teaching, or other curricular initiatives around senior theses or intensive research opportunities. Provost Epstein said that, under the proposal, she would consult with departments about their curricula and staffing in relation to faculty members' requests to take course reductions. To reduce the burden on faculty members' time, the provost noted that, to the extent possible, most routine college committee work should be reduced, and that committees should prioritize pressing college matters, according to the ASC's recommendation. Attempts should be made to protect tenure-track colleagues from demanding college-wide service.

Provost Epstein next discussed the ways in which the ASC envisions departments considering the courses that they choose to mount at this time. She noted that the ASC will propose that decisions about course offerings be made at the departmental level and not the individual level, emphasizing the importance of department-wide consultation. Provost Epstein said that the ASC will encourage departments to prioritize offering a range of courses that will serve both introductory functions, including those needed for major requirements and those required for college-wide curricular service (e.g. introductory-level courses), noting that departments will need to assess how best to distribute the work of mounting those courses. In a remote learning environment, departments might wish to adjust their requirements for the major, with the constraint that majors must comprise at least eight required courses, the provost noted. Departments should consider eliminating or combining one or more low-enrollment (fewer than nine students) elective courses to reduce their instructional burden during the next academic year, the ASC will recommend. Departments may offset offering courses with small enrollments by offering large lectures courses and will need to create a staffing plan, Provost Epstein said. It would be useful to share these plans at a chairs' meeting to exchange ideas, the committee agreed. In addition, the ASC will note, enrollment caps on some courses can be adjusted. The provost noted that departments must keep in mind, however, that, when 1,800 students are enrolled and taking four courses per semester, class-size averages need to be around eighteen students per course. If fewer students are enrolled, those averages will go down; if fewer courses are taught, those averages go up. The provost commented that student response to their experience this spring suggests that both large enrollment and small enrollment courses can go well in the online environment, but that discussion-based courses of twenty-five to thirty students were the most problematic. The ASC also will suggest that team teaching of larger courses be encouraged. Professor Brooks asked if new faculty and visiting faculty and fellows, who typically have small enrollments in their classes in the first year, should be encouraged to co-teach. Provost Epstein said that this would be possible, and also that new faculty could serve as advisors for theses and

research projects, both in their own departments and, possibly in other departments. It will also be possible for faculty to teach multiple sections of the same course in one semester, thus reducing the time they need to devote to preparation.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Goutte asked if students would be permitted to take two lab courses, which would be 1.5 credits each, as a full course load. Provost Epstein said that this would be permissible during this unusual time, under the ASC's recommendations. Advisors could suggest alternatives, it was noted. Professor Goutte commented that it will be important for students who are pursuing the pre-med curriculum to be advised over the summer, in light of these course-load options, to make sure they will be able to meet all requirements by the time they graduate, and without putting extra burden on later semesters. Provost Epstein said that plans are in place to provide such advising to students under a cohort model, as is already done during orientation for new students. Professor Goutte asked if it would be helpful for science departments to chart some sample curricula for the next year that would provide templates for pre-med students. Provost Epstein responded that doing so would be very helpful. Turning to another topic, Professor Goutte asked if it might be possible for faculty to elect to teach a reduced course load for one or both semesters next year and to teach three courses during future semesters. Provost Epstein said that, while the ASC might consider this option, she worries that, under such a system, it might take faculty a long time to "repay" the courses that were not taught. This might not be the best option for faculty, in her view. Professor Goutte expressed some concern about all faculty having the option of overseeing research projects instead of teaching courses. Provost Epstein said that departments would hopefully prioritize that pre-tenure colleagues receive the option of reducing their teaching loads in this way. She noted that it would also be important for departments to ensure that, while there is a focus on teaching, faculty who are in the early stages of their careers, as well as other faculty, have the opportunity to pursue their research.

Professor Horton asked about the process to address decisions to teach in person. Provost Epstein and President Martin noted that the expectation will be that faculty who are not bound by concerns about their age, do not have underlying health conditions, or do not live with someone with an underlying health condition will teach in person, when students return to campus. Of course, no faculty member will be forced to do so, they said. Professor Horton offered the suggestion that, for the next year, departments, such as mathematics and statistics, that typically have courses with a high number of weekly meetings (e.g., a fourth hour in mathematics and statistics courses) have faculty teach in person for a longer session one day a week, and virtually during the other class sessions. This approach could facilitate learning and optimize the time available for classrooms to be cleaned. In regard to classrooms, the provost said that Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, and Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, are working on ensuring that there would be a sufficient number of classrooms for classes with different enrollments, given the need for social distancing. Larger spaces on campus that currently have other uses may be converted into classrooms, she noted. President Martin said that she would support having as many class meetings as possible outdoors, while the weather permits, as doing so would reduce the risk of spreading the virus. She also sees the value of making use of tents (with open sides to permit air flow) for classes and of having as much dining as possible take place outdoors. Provost Epstein said she supports this approach as well, while noting that classes with significant technology needs would not be able to take place in tents. Allowing teaching in the evening would also help with classroom availability, it was noted. To this end, the ASC will recommend that the registrar be asked to develop an expanded course schedule that stretches into the evening, Provost Epstein said. It is hoped that this will permit teaching times that work better for students in different time zones and that provide additional teaching flexibility for faculty. Professor Basu commented that the ASC will also recommend that the registrar be asked to establish a sixty-to-ninety-minute weekly community hour. Such a time could be used for lectures, panels, dialogues, and listening sessions for and by faculty, staff, and students and will help strengthen connections during a time of social distancing.

Professor Basu next informed the members about the ASC's deliberations around guidelines regarding tenure. She noted that the ASC will encourage the Committee of Six to adopt the following recommendations: that candidates, in their letters on their own behalf to the Committee of Six at the time of reappointment and tenure, document the impact of COVID-19 on their teaching and research trajectories; that departmental letters to outside reviewers at the time of tenure explicitly solicit information on the impact of COVID-19 on research

and publishing in the candidate's field, and thus on the expected research progress of candidates for tenure; and that departmental recommendations at the time of tenure address the effect of COVID-19 on candidates' research, describing the impact of the pandemic on doing research, acquiring grants, and publishing scholarly work; and that the absence of college-wide service during the COVID-19 period have no bearing on a tenure decision.

Professor Goutte commented that it is unclear when the faculty laboratories will be able to function. She noted the challenges faced by scientists at small colleges are more acute than those faced by scientists at research universities. The latter rely on graduate students and postdocs, who will repopulate the labs as they reopen, and some have reopened already, she noted. Scientists at colleges such as Amherst, on the other hand, rely on providing hands-on training to undergraduates so that they can gradually lead research efforts in the lab. The lack of students in the labs has not only halted research, but has also halted the training pipeline, which will have an impact on several years of research ahead. Professor Goutte stressed the importance of including and perhaps increasing the representation of outside reviewers from predominantly undergraduate colleges for this reason. Professor Sims also suggested that the outside reviewers be informed that faculty were asked to prioritize teaching over research during the pandemic, which might explain a reduction in research productivity. Professor Basu said that it is her understanding that the college's expectation will not be to prioritize teaching over research, and the provost concurred. The ASC decided against prioritizing teaching over research. Instead, the hope is to make the teaching burden less onerous in a variety of ways. President Martin commented that she is aware that the pandemic has also had an impact on the ability of some scientists at research universities to move forward with their research.

The committee expressed its gratitude to the ASC for all of its hard work on the faculty and college's behalf, and the members said that they look forward to learning more about the draft recommendations at the faculty meeting the next day.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty