

The thirty-sixth 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 3, 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,” Provost Epstein informed the members that, based on feedback they had been given about plans to have orientation advising take place over the summer, she conferred with Professor López, dean of new students, about the possibility of rethinking this idea. The provost said that she and Professor López have agreed that orientation advising will take place right before orientation for new students, or during orientation itself. She informed the members that a communication will go out to the faculty about this change and thanked them for sharing their views about the matter.

Discussion turned briefly to plans for the committee to review the nominations for the 2021 Jeffrey Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize. It was agreed that the members would do so at their meeting on May 17. After discussing whether to consider nominations made in previous years as part of the deliberations, it was agreed that the committee would prioritize this year’s nominations, but would also review nominations received in past years.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Trapani commented that, when he had been on campus recently, he had observed many students enjoying the City Streets celebration (held on April 14). He expressed appreciation to those who had organized the successful event for the students.

Discussion turned to [the draft charge for the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of the Procedures and Practices Used for the Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness](#). The members discussed several revisions and finalized the charge. The provost noted that faculty members will be appointed to this ad hoc committee when the members consider other committee nominations at their meeting of May 10.

The committee next discussed individual letters that [Professors Hall](#), [Holleman](#), and [Kunichika](#) had sent to the committee. Noting Professor Holleman’s suggestion that the Antiracism Student Advisory Group be invited to speak at a faculty meeting, the members commented that these students have offered testimony about their experiences surrounding policing and campus safety on a number of occasions and to multiple constituencies—including at a meeting with the board of trustees and with the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CODEI). The group has also met weekly with President Martin this year, she noted. While the committee was open to the idea of extending an invitation to the students to speak at a faculty meeting, some concern was expressed about the toll that recounting their experiences yet again could take on students, and whether the college should be relying on them to do so. It was suggested that an alternative might be for the members of the CODEI to provide an update to the faculty about what the students had conveyed. Professor Trapani, the Committee of Six representative on the CODEI, commented that, in March, the students had given a powerful presentation to the CODEI that may have been similar to what they had given to the board of trustees. He noted that they had provided some survey data about policing and the Amherst College Police Department (ACPD)’s role and relationship to campus safety, had shared some of their on-campus experiences in compelling ways, and had called for change. He noted that the CODEI had a thoughtful and productive conversation and was grateful for the student presentation.

The president commented that time needs to be taken to learn more about the full range of views held by members of the community on the very complex issues that revolve around campus safety and policing. It is clear that some faculty and staff currently do not feel comfortable discussing what they believe at this time, and it is essential to find ways to allow all views to be shared. President Martin informed the members that the college has engaged consultants (Cambridge Hill Partners) to share expertise and advice, facilitate conversations about policing and campus safety, and share information about different policing and public safety models used by other institutions, some of which may be evolving.

Continuing the conversation, President Martin noted that, while John Carter, chief of police and director of public safety, has offered some ideas about how the ACPD might be reimagined, which he has shared with the community in response to questions from students, the administration will be developing the final plans and recommendations that are forwarded to the board of trustees. The president said that, while she will soon announce some changes in the area of campus safety, thinking through some issues will take some time, and will inform recommendations that the administration will make to the board; the trustees will ultimately make final decisions on any proposals for significant changes to the campus police, the president said.

Professor Umphrey, noting that Chief Carter has mentioned the appointment of a consultative group comprising students, faculty, and staff to consider some of the issues that have been raised, asked if there are plans to charge such a group. President Martin responded that she envisions appointing soon an advisory committee made up of students, faculty, and staff to help guide the work of creating a broadly consultative process for co-creating and re-creating Amherst's community safety structure. The committee commented that, since Professor Holleman sent her letter, there has been additional conversation about the ACPD and related issues, and it is clear that plans call for continued discussion.

Turning to [Professor Kunichika's letter](#), it was noted that he had written to the committee on April 23, 2021, the day after the publication of an article titled "[#BlackMindsMatter Protest is 'Reactionary and Performative' 'appeared in the Amherst Student](#)". Professor Umphrey said that she concurs with the thrust of Professor Kunichika's letter, that, in accordance with the principles of shared governance, faculty committees should respond to student demands that are within the faculty's purview, specifically, in this case, those surrounding excused absences. Such responses, as Professor Kunichika noted, should not be left to the administration alone, in her view. Professor Umphrey commented that it should be made clear to students that faculty retain authority over their own classrooms. (See [the policy on classroom attendance](#), *Faculty Handbook IV, D.*) The other members agreed. Provost Epstein mentioned that the Committee on Educational Policy is currently considering whether to issue a statement that would encourage faculty to be flexible with excused absences during this challenging time. Any formal policy change in regard to excused absences would require a vote of the faculty, she noted.

The members next considered the proposals that Professor Hall, chair of the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) had shared in [his letter on behalf of that committee](#). Some Committee of Six members were agnostic about whether continuing members of the FCAFA should not be eligible to serve on the Committee of Six while serving on the FCAFA, as had been proposed, while others did not support the idea. The committee did not feel that retiring members of the FCAFA should be excused from service on the Committee of Six the year after they completed their service on the FCAFA (unless they were on leave). In regard to the proposal, Provost Epstein expressed some concern about reducing further the pool of tenured faculty members who are eligible to serve on the Committee of Six, while noting that exemptions from Committee of Six service that are given current and retiring members of some other committee also do not make that much sense, in her view. Professor Leise wondered if other committees might ask for similar exemptions if current and retiring members of the FCAFA are excused from service on the Committee of Six. In the end, it was decided that it would be best to learn more about the findings and recommendations of Susan Pierce, the consultant who is studying the committee structure at the college and how service is and might be tracked, before making any decisions about these issues, as well as the proposal that the members of the FCAFA be elected. Professor Manion commented that there is a lack of transparency on how chairs are selected for some committees, including the ways in which the chair rotates among the members of a committee who serve for a term of multiple years.

Conversation turned to a draft charge that the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty had forwarded to the committee for consideration. After noting some concerns about aspects of the

proposal, the members discussed how best to support and guide tenure-track faculty in the work of creating a charge, and also whether the goal of formalizing the consultative group as a standing committee of the faculty is the most effective structure for carrying out the group's work. It is possible that remaining a more informal group would offer the benefit of needed flexibility, Professor Umphrey commented. The members agreed that, once again, it would be helpful to wait for S. Pierce to complete her study before thinking further about this issue. The president and provost said that S. Pierce would like to meet with the Committee of Six before the end of this academic year. S. Pierce will continue with her work over the summer, President Martin noted. Professor del Moral asked whether the proposal to split the Committee of Six into two separate committees—one tenure and promotion and one executive committee of the faculty—could also be discussed with S. Pierce. Provost Epstein noted that she and the president had asked the consultant to make a recommendation about this issue. It was agreed that it can be challenging for the Committee of Six to have the time needed to consider policy issues, while also devoting significant time to personnel matters.

The meeting concluded with the committee reporting in more detail about concerns that had been raised at the committee's annual meeting with tenure-track faculty on April 26. (See also the committee's minutes of April 30, in which some of these issues are also described). The members explained that there appears to be a strong desire among many assistant professors to have a faculty advocate to whom they can turn with concerns around the impact of COVID-19 that they don't feel comfortable sharing with others at the college, including their department chairs. Provost Epstein asked if the assistant professors felt that the faculty equity and inclusion officer (FEIO)s could assume this role. Professor del Moral commented that it doesn't appear that this function is seen as being part of the role of the FEIOs. The proposal was that the advocate be the equivalent of a class dean, but for tenure-track faculty. In addition, a great deal of the discussion had, as mentioned in the April 30 minutes, focused on the devastating impact that the pandemic has had on some faculty members' research productivity, including the magnitude of the impact on some STEM faculty. In this regard, some concern had been raised that the accommodations that have been provided by the college, in an effort to be equitable and to treat all faculty in the same way, do not address the differential impact that COVID-19 has had on faculty in particular disciplines. The members suggested that it would be helpful if those faculty members whose research has been stalled by the pandemic offer greater clarity about what accommodations would be most helpful to them. There was also some discussion about the impact that the pandemic has had on teaching, with the shift to remote learning, and whether the option not to solicit teaching evaluations should be extended to this semester. In regard to this idea, the committee did not recommend taking this approach, and the members had stressed at the meeting that the Committee of Six strives to contextualize evaluations. Finally, the committee commented that some assistant professors seem to feel that they must achieve a level of research productivity that is equivalent to that of a faculty member at an R1 institution. The committee, the president, and the dean stressed the importance of offering greater clarity on the criteria for tenure at the college, without delay, and expressed support for making progress by, as a first step, asking departments to articulate their expectations for what should be achieved by the time of tenure and the standards in their field. It was agreed that the committee would discuss this idea further at one of the remaining meetings of the academic year.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty