

The twenty-seventh 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 Thursday, May 7, 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.

Under “Topics of the Day,” Provost Epstein asked the members advice about the practice, which was adopted in 2012, of celebrating retiring faculty members at their final faculty meeting by having a citation read. The provost explained that, for a number of years prior to that time, citations about retiring faculty members had been read at commencement. She understands that some retiring colleagues had objected to the practice, which had then been discontinued. Provost Epstein commented that, over the years, more and more retiring colleagues have expressed the desire not to have citations written or read at faculty meetings. She suggested that an alternative might be having the president read the names of all faculty who are retiring in a given year at the last faculty meeting. A profile of the retiree could then be published in the *Amherst Magazine*. In her view, alumni of the college would be very interested in such pieces, which are often done now. The provost commented on the importance of memorial minutes, a tradition of longstanding that she feels should continue. She then asked for the members’ thoughts about discontinuing the practice of reading citations for retiring faculty members. The committee expressed support for honoring faculty members upon their retirement, and Professors Basu and Goutte expressed support for continuing with the citations at the final faculty meeting of the year. Professor Sims also expressed support for continuing with the citations for those who wish to have them, and suggested that part of the problem might be that criteria about the length of the citations have not been established, and departments may feel that they should be writing very lengthy citations. Associate Provost Tobin, who coordinates the citation process, said that departments are informed that the citations should be around 250 words. The citations are often longer, she noted. The members agreed that next year’s Committee of Six should consider ways to honor retiring faculty members. The provost said that, in her view, it might be best to postpone until the faculty can gather in person the reading of the citation for the one retiring colleague who has agreed to have this done this year. The other faculty members who are retiring this year have declined the invitation to have a citation read. Provost Epstein suggested that the members consider this proposal at the committee’s next meeting.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Basu thanked President Martin and the members of the senior staff for the leadership that they have demonstrated in agreeing to take salary reductions (for the president, 20 percent and for the senior staff, up to 15 percent), in response to the impact that the pandemic is having on the college’s budget. The other members added their appreciation for this gesture.

Professor Basu next asked if the membership and charge of the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Academic Structures during COVID-19 (ASC) will be announced to the community. The provost noted plans to inform the community via the provost’s newsletter about the ASC, which the president has charged with thinking broadly, imaginatively, and practically about temporary changes to address the challenges that COVID-19 is posing to the fulfillment of the college’s academic mission. The provost commented that the members of the ASC will recommend for the 2020–2021 academic year adjustments to structures to support remote learning and teaching, recognizing the likelihood that this mode will be necessary for some part of the year and/or for some students and faculty. [The charge to the ASC is available online](#), Provost Epstein commented. She then confirmed that, in addition to herself, the following faculty members have agreed to serve on the ASC: Scott Alfeld, Amrita Basu, Tekla Harms, Darryl Harper, Michael Kunichika, Jen Manion, and Pat O’Hara. The provost said that she would chair the ASC.

Continuing with questions, Professor Basu asked President Martin about the implications of the new Title IX regulations that the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights had released on May 6. The president responded that she has not yet had time to review the two thousand pages of new federal regulations. She said that, in the coming weeks, Title IX Coordinator Laurie Frankl will do so, and will determine what required revisions will need to be made to Amherst’s current policies and procedures to achieve compliance with the new rules. Her evaluation of the new regulations will be shared with the Amherst community, including changes to the college’s processes that will be

mandated, as well as where there will be opportunities for community input. President Martin noted that, unlike some institutions, Amherst already has a live hearing process, while commenting that there will need to be changes to that process, such as requiring advisors (who could include attorneys) to cross-examine the parties involved. It is also her understanding that, under the new regulations, colleges and universities will still have a choice about the standard of evidence that they use. Professor Brooks commented on the helpfulness of meetings that had been held when new Title IX guidelines had been proposed, and recalled that faculty participants and President Martin had affirmed the need for continued and strengthened education around sexual respect at the college. She suggested that these new changes may prompt Amherst to take a closer look at how restorative justice can be used in some Title IX cases. President Martin agreed that a restorative-justice model could be helpful for resolving some cases.

Professor Basu next suggested that the committee take time at future meetings to discuss the unequal service burdens across the faculty, which she feels are increasing in the midst of the pandemic. Determining what types of service are most important during this time, and recognizing those who are doing such service, is important, in her view. Concluding her inquires, Professor Basu asked whether the Committee of Six has or should have a formal role in addressing race relations on campus, noting that the members have been taking on responsibilities in this area recently, meeting with the leadership of the Black Student Union (BSU) and, soon, the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. Provost Epstein noted that the BSU leadership, as other college constituencies do, had reached out to the Committee of Six, and that the committee, as is appropriate, had responded. In her view, issues such as bias reporting and implementing restorative practices may be considered by the committee, when they are brought forward through regular governance processes and/or requests. She doesn't necessarily feel that responsibility for race relations is part of the committee's charge, per se. In the case of the student leaders, the Committee of Six was a natural body to which they would reach out, because the committee members likely see the committee members as faculty leaders.

Professor Brooks expressed the view that the Committee of Six has a formal role in addressing issues surrounding diversity and inclusion. In reviewing the charge to the Presidential Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion, she was surprised to learn that a member of the Committee of Six should be serving on the task force (no current member was asked to serve, she noted). The committee is thus accountable when it comes to issues surrounding diversity and inclusion, and she feels, through no fault of the committee itself, that the members have neglected their responsibility. Professor Brooks commented that the faculty made commitments following the Amherst Uprising and that it is very important to fulfill them. Having conduits to faculty committees serve on the task force seems important, in her view. Provost Epstein noted that Committee of Six members have served on the task force in the past. The task force is not a standing committee of the faculty, so members are not appointed using the process that is in place for those committees, the provost noted. President Martin commented that the task force had been in place before Norm Jones, the college's first chief diversity and inclusion officer, had arrived at the college. She asked him to take over the leadership of the body, including proposing faculty members to serve and co-chair the task force. President Martin commented that Professor Brooks had raised important issues and said that she would consult with N. Jones about whether he finds the current structure of this advisory body to be the most helpful. She noted that, in the past, the task force had prepared information for the review conducted by the External Advisory Committee on Diversity, Inclusion and Excellence and had met with the external committee twice. President Martin commented that L. Frankl and Dean Gendron, senior associate dean of students, are currently working on developing a proposal for a bias-reporting system and restorative protocols, informed by work that the task force has done on these projects. President Martin said that she would think further about the issues raised in this conversation.

Professor Goutte, turning to another topic, asked if staff performance evaluations will be done this semester, given the impact of the pandemic, which includes having most staff work remotely. Provost Epstein said that she understands that plans call for making use of a streamlined version of the evaluation system, which will resemble the mid-year check-in. In this way the extraordinary

performance of the staff during COVID-19 can be documented. Any issues that have come up during this time should also be documented, the provost noted. It is her understanding that the Office of Human Resources will be sending out information soon about the form that will be used. The provost commented that, since there is a salary freeze in place, performance evaluations will not have an impact on the level of salary increases, as can be the case under the typical system.

Continuing with questions, Professor Horton asked about the recent announcement that a student on campus has tested positive for COVID-19, which had followed the news that a custodian who has been working on campus also has the virus. He asked about the results of contact tracing and other steps that have been taken to protect the health of others within the Amherst community. Provost Epstein explained that all of the students who were in Morris Pratt, where the custodian had been working, were dispersed across campus, and have been living with many fewer students per floor/building. These students have not come to Valentine to pick up food; meals have been delivered to their buildings out of caution. The student who tested positive was one of the students who had been dispersed, and that student is now quarantined in the dorm where the individual had moved. She believes that all students who were moved to that dorm have since moved again. President Martin noted that the student who has tested positive has had very few contacts with other students, as it turns out. The student seems to have a relatively mild case of the virus and is able to continue with academic work, and colleagues from health services and student affairs have been checking in often.

All agreed that this case of the virus spreading points to the difficulty of keeping students apart in a residential setting. Professor Schmalzbauer commented that she has heard that some students who are now on campus have not been diligent about always practicing social distancing, which leads her to be concerned about what might happen if many students return to campus in the fall, if the pandemic is continuing. President Martin said that one condition of bringing students back to Amherst will be having much stricter rules in place to reduce the risk of spreading the virus—which would include continual testing and strict social-distancing protocols. In addition, she noted, there would need to be serious consequences (most notably being sent home) for violating the social contract to which all would need to agree. Professor Basu concurred that it seems clear that not all students who are on campus now seem to be following the rules about social distancing. She expressed concern, noting that some students are also worried about catching the virus from other students who are not taking precautions surrounding COVID-19 seriously. She agrees that a strong social contract, with attending consequences, should be put in place. Professor Basu suggested that these steps be implemented with the small number of students who are remaining on campus this summer. It would be informative to see if students would take the rules seriously. President Martin agreed that implementing this approach would be helpful.

Professor Sims asked if staff who may have been exposed to the coronavirus are currently able to obtain testing. The president said that staff need to rely on their own physicians for referrals for testing, while noting that it is her understanding that, at present, testing is not readily available in the area. Professor Sims asked whether the student who has the virus can go outside in the open air to promote well-being, or if this student must stay in the dorm room during the entire period of quarantine. Upon learning that the student must stay inside, she asked whether there is a window in the room to provide ventilation, which is particularly important when it comes to lessening the spread of the virus if others come into the student's space. President Martin reassured her that the student is being very well cared for, and that robust precautions are in place.

Professor Schmalzbauer noted the recent announcement that Hampshire plans to resume in-person classes in the fall, and that the school will be conducting regular testing for COVID-19 antibodies and for the virus. She expressed her surprise by the announcement, which was on the front page of the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, and asked if President Martin could provide any insight. President Martin said that the other Five-College presidents were not informed in advance about this announcement. She noted that she would be speaking with several of the presidents the next day, and said that she anticipates that Hampshire students will not be permitted to take courses on the other campuses, if there is a return to in-person classes in the fall. The president also informed the members that she has spoken

with Kumble Subbaswamy, chancellor of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, to see if it might be possible for the university to run tests for the virus for Amherst in university labs, and to analyze results. Professor Goutte commented that she had been thinking about possibilities to run tests in the college's labs. Unfortunately, while Amherst has the equipment to do necessary polymerase chain reaction (PCR)s, there are no staff on hand to do the necessary work, and no one is properly trained in obtaining and handling the potentially infectious samples. President Martin expressed appreciation for all of the ideas that members of the community are suggesting. On a related note, she said that she had recently asked Avery Farmer '20, president of the Association of Amherst Students, if he would help constitute a student advisory group to consider ideas related to remote learning and other adjustments during the pandemic. President Martin noted that he has already sent her the names of six to eight students who are willing to serve. Professor Goutte said it would be interesting to have these students, as part of their deliberations, interview the students who have been on campus this spring to learn more about their experience as a way to inform what works and what doesn't work well.

The members turned next to assignments for faculty committees, reviewing a list of suggestions brought forward by the provost's office and making alternative recommendations, in some cases. Professor Sims expressed the view that it might be best to delay appointing colleagues to serve on committees until more is known about the format for teaching and learning in the fall. She noted that some faculty members will not be able to serve if schools and daycare centers remain closed. The provost responded that many of the colleagues whom she has suggested join various committee are either tenured, or untenured individuals who are returning from post-reappointment leaves. The practice, for the most part, is not to appoint untenured colleagues to serve on major committees, for example the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) and the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid, though there are exceptions. The provost feels that it is important to staff committees and to continue with shared governance, knowing that regular business may need to be abbreviated in the fall. If a governance body is needed to consider an issue related to COVID-19, however, having the membership in place will be important, in her view. Professor Basu asked if the three working groups (Logistics, Hybrid Learning, and Finance) and the ASC will continue their work in the fall. Provost Epstein said that these bodies are expected to complete their work before the end of the fiscal year. Professor Goutte said that, on an annual basis when making committee assignments, it would be helpful for the Committee of Six to be provided with a list of the chairs of academic departments and programs for the next academic year, so that this responsibility can be factored into decisions about whom to invite to serve on committees.

Continuing the discussion about committees, Professor Horton noted, more generally, that some committees require a much greater time commitment than others. In regard to Professor Basu's concern about the unevenness of service burdens, he feels that it will be important to have a conversation in the future about committee service. He has observed that there are some faculty members who do not serve on committees, while others are regularly engaged in service that is very time-consuming. Professor Sims said that she has noticed this pattern as well. Professor Sims also commented that, if colleagues need to teach one course at a reduced salary in the fall because it is not possible to care for children at home and continue the current teaching load, she does not feel that they should then have to take on heavy service burdens. The provost said that she would anticipate that, if colleagues teach a one-course load in a given semester, they would be compensated with 72 percent of their salary and would be expected to do some service, as is the practice at the college when individuals have a reason to teach just one course in a semester. President Martin commented on the need to provide the faculty with the flexibility that is needed to make remote learning work. She is convinced that, if the college must move to remote learning in the fall, there must be adjustments. In her view, students will need to be taught in small groups and will require more of the faculty's time. Provost Epstein agreed, while noting that the ability to have faculty teach fewer courses and to have small enrollments is somewhat dependent on the number of students who are enrolled at the college.

The members next reviewed proposals for a Whiting Foundation Public Engagement Seed Grant that had been submitted by members of the faculty and selected one individual to be Amherst's nominee for

the grant. The members also concurred with the provost and president's recommendation that a colleague receive a named professorship.

A brief conversation followed about additional data that Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, had provided to the committee about the distribution of students taking courses that are attentive to issues of race, class, and gender and sexuality. Professor Basu had requested this information to learn more about how the intersection of identities may be influencing students' course selections in these areas, for example, by comparing athletes by race and gender. She had also requested information to learn how course selection might differ across athletic teams. The new data show that there is no appreciable difference among male and female athletes in their course selections in these areas (there were more male athletes than female athletes included in the data, it was noted). Professor Basu suggested that, in the future, it would be interesting to examine students' course selections in these fields by major. Professor Horton feels that the real question to address might be whether some groups of students, for example, athletes from a particular team, are clustering in certain courses. Professor Sims said that, while she can usually break up clusters in her courses, by having students do work in groups to which she assigns them, for example, she feels that the real challenge is to break up the clustering that takes place among students at the time of enrollment in courses. Professor Brooks agreed and said that it is important to learn whether some clusters of students are not taking any courses on race and class and/or not learning about the history of colonialism. This information would be helpful to know when advising, she commented. Professor Schmalzbauer noted the need to ensure that students of all identities are encouraged to take, and are welcomed in, courses that include challenging and sensitive conversations surrounding issues of race, class, sexuality, and gender. Professor Basu expressed the view that it is important to have students with a mix of backgrounds learn together in these courses. She asked if the tagging of these courses has provided adequate information about patterns of students' course selection. Professor Horton said that he believes that the CEP has made efforts to focus on identifying and tagging courses by category and improved the ability for students and faculty to search based on these tags.

The meeting ended with a decision to have a faculty meeting on May 21 to discuss efforts to address racism on campus and to include student-leaders of the BSU, who have been asked to share their own experiences with racism at Amherst. An update on college planning surrounding COVID-19 would also be on the agenda, it was decided. The members agreed to discuss the format for the faculty meeting at their next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty