

The twenty-fifth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2021–2022 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, May 9, 2022. Present via Zoom, in addition to the president, were Professors Clotfelter, Manion, Martini, Schroeder Rodríguez, Umphrey, and Vaughan; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with President Martin expressing concern about the impact of postings that some Amherst students are making using GroupMe (a service from Microsoft that is available on the web and as an app for mobile devices). GroupMe allows unlimited group text messaging. An *Amherst Student* piece stated that about 1,200 Amherst students are in the group, and it has been suggested that students are the only individuals allowed to join it. The president informed the members that she has learned from students that some Amherst students have launched vicious attacks against other Amherst students on GroupMe. As a result of some postings, students are said to have been shunned and ostracized. She suggested that, given the respect that Amherst students have for their professors, it would be helpful if faculty would discuss with students the serious impact that chats of this kind can have on some students' lives and the problematic online student culture it suggests. Some members said that some students have discussed the GroupMe postings with them. One member has devoted part of a class to discussing this issue. Another commented that a student said that, while the postings are awful and that the individual would not post on GroupMe, the student found the postings riveting and followed them. The committee wondered if the Office of Student Affairs is actively monitoring and mediating the situation with this platform. The president said that the college is considering what actions it can take to address this situation, but that there is no monitoring. The committee suggested that the president discuss the matter at the upcoming faculty meeting to raise awareness about the GroupMe.

Provost Epstein next reminded the members that, as noted on the academic calendar, Monday, May 16, is a makeup day for classes missed earlier in the semester. While it is completely up to faculty members whether they wish to make use of this day, she asked that, when making their decision, colleagues consider that many students are feeling exhausted after what has been another challenging semester.

Continuing with her remarks, the provost informed the committee that the president and she plan to bring a motion to the board of trustees at its commencement meeting to remove the language shown below in red from the *Faculty Handbook* ([III., E., 3., second paragraph](#)). Provost Epstein noted that the board voted to adopt this language and place it in the tenure criteria section in 1992. She said that this committee and prior Committees of Six, as well as individual faculty, have raised concern about this language, which conveys that certain "institutional considerations" can be a reason to deny tenure to an individual.

3. The Criteria for Tenure

The college values faculty whose commitment to the life of the mind is demonstrated through excellence in teaching, scholarship, and/or the creation of works of art, and contributions to professional service. Amherst tenures faculty who demonstrate growth, achievement, and continuing promise in both scholarship and teaching, evinced by a notable record of scholarly and/or artistic accomplishment and a demonstrated ability to teach undergraduates effectively. These two aspects of a candidate's record are of primary consideration in the tenure decision. Strength in one will not compensate for shortcoming in the other. A record of scholarly excellence must include evidence of original research that is peer-reviewed or of comparable scholarly rigor and standing, and/or its equivalent in the creative arts. A record of teaching excellence must include evidence of the ability to convey knowledge and engage students in rigorous and stimulating ways and a commitment to their intellectual growth. Additionally, faculty members are expected to contribute to their home departments and programs, to the life and work of the college, and to their professional fields (voted by the faculty, April 26, 2022).

Institutional considerations may play a role at the time of tenure, but if they are invoked, the president will give a full account of the reasons why. Institutional considerations include factors such as the tenure structure of the department, the rank structure of the department, and the fields of competence of the faculty member being considered for tenure in relation to those already represented in the department. Although the college has no formula for the percentage of faculty on

tenure, or for the distribution of faculty by anticipated retirement or rank generally or within departments, a particular judgment may be made which takes such factors into account (adopted by trustee vote, April 4, 1992).

Continuing, Provost Epstein said that she and the president agree that it is not appropriate to deny tenure on the basis of rank structure or field, and that the language on "institutional considerations" in the section on tenure criteria should no longer be part of the *Faculty Handbook*. She noted that, although the *Faculty Handbook* has sparse language on the termination of tenured faculty members (see [Faculty Handbook III., I., 1.](#) and below), she and the president believe that the college is sufficiently protected by the language that is in place, should Amherst need to terminate tenured members of the faculty, particularly if doing so is warranted by financial exigency. The wording permits the college to terminate tenured faculty members for "adequate cause" or "extraordinary circumstances because of financial exigencies." In general, Provost Epstein said that the president and she believe that the primary reason why the college would want to terminate tenured faculty members (other than "for cause," which is also covered) would be due to the college undergoing very severe financial hardship. She informed the members that she and the president will also suggest to the trustees very minor changes to the current language, shown below, for reasons of clarity. These are replacing a comma after *exigencies* with a period and capitalizing the *The* that follows, which now begins what is a separate sentence. In addition, these changes include substituting the word *meaning* for *definition* of tenure, so that the language in the *Faculty Handbook* is consistent.

1. Termination

The connection with the college of faculty members appointed for specified terms shall automatically cease at the end of the term specified, unless they are reappointed. **A member of the faculty holding a term appointment or an appointment without term may be relieved of his or her appointment at any time by the board of trustees only for adequate cause or under extraordinary circumstances because of financial exigencies. The appointment of a faculty member with tenure can be terminated only for those reasons consistent with the meaning of tenure.**

The provost also pointed the committee to the description of the meaning of tenure in the [Faculty Handbook \(III. E., 1.\)](#):

An appointment with tenure means an appointment without limit of time that can be terminated only for adequate cause or under extraordinary circumstances because of financial exigencies. Academic tenure and academic freedom are distinguishable but linked in the life of a college or university. Without freedom to explore new ideas, or to criticize existing beliefs and institutions, higher learning would become a sterile exercise and society would suffer accordingly. Academic freedom must be sustained for all faculty without regard to rank or tenure, recognizing the fact that the use of such freedom may anger powerful vested interests in the larger society or arouse the ire of administrators, faculty colleagues, or students within the academy. Tenure is an institutional safeguard for the conditions of academic freedom.

The protection of academic freedom by a guarantee of permanent tenure, therefore, represents an important part of the continuous effort that must be made to preserve the freedom of thought and speech that is the breath of life for a democratic society. This being so, then, tenure imposes upon all who receive it the reciprocal obligation to make the fullest use of such freedom and to carry the results of honest and imaginative inquiry to the larger society even though this act may challenge cherished beliefs and established institutions. Tenure requires also that faculty members foster freedom of inquiry for their colleagues and their students and respect the virtues of intellectual integrity and the claims of reason and evidence.

The members then turned to nominating colleagues to serve on the memorial minute committee for Richard J. Cody, Eliza J. Clark Folger Professor of English, Emeritus, who died on April 30, 2022.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Clotfelter asked about the expected number of students and guests who will attend the commencement being planned for the class of 2020. Provost Epstein said that she believes that 260 of the 453 students in the class of 2020 have registered for commencement, and that 1,148 guests are expected. Professor Clotfelter next inquired as to whether the commencement for the class of 2020 will mirror a regular commencement. Provost Epstein responded that there will be differences, for example the ceremony will be on Saturday instead of Sunday, noting that the event will take place in the afternoon. President Martin informed the members that the honorary degree recipients will give charges to the graduates, rather than offering speeches on a separate day. When asked about the upcoming reunion, and what attendance might be like, the president said that the expectation is that it will be a standard reunion, except that classes that have missed their fifth, twenty-fifth, or fiftieth reunions will also be invited to attend (the classes of 2015, 2016, 1995, 1996, and 1970 and 1971). She noted that she is aware that the class of 2017 is excited to be coming to campus for its first reunion. The number of alumni who plan to attend reunion is not yet known.

Continuing with questions, Professor Schroeder Rodríguez, who said that he had been contacted by a student writing an article for the *Amherst Student* about the faculty’s decision to divide the Committee of Six into two committees, asked if it would be appropriate to share the charges to the Faculty Executive Committee and the Tenure and Promotion Committee with the student. It was agreed that doing so would be fine.

Conversation turned to the committee’s proposal that, to better protect the identities of honors students, end-of-semester evaluations no longer be solicited from honors students—and that confidential letters from these students, solicited after they complete their honors experience, be used instead. Under the proposal, all honors students, whether they complete their honors work or not, would be asked to write confidential “annual” letters after receiving a final grade (after one semester, if they do not complete honors work, or after two semesters, if they do). In addition, the committee decided that “retrospective letters” should continue to be solicited from honors students at the time of the reappointment and tenure review. Under the proposal, annual letters and retrospective letters from honors students would become part of the candidate’s dossier at the time of the reappointment and tenure and would be summarized in the departmental recommendation at the time of those reviews, a redacted version of which would be shared with the candidate. It was agreed that candidates would not be provided with the annual letters themselves, which is also the case for retrospective letters. If approved, it was agreed that this change would be effective for future reappointment and tenure cases, but that for all tenure-track faculty hired before July 1, 2022, any end-of semester evaluations from honors students that have already been collected would be included in their tenure and reappointment dossiers. The members agreed to bring the proposal forward as a motion at the May 17 faculty meeting.

The members next discussed briefly their recent meeting with tenure-track faculty members. (The committee meets annually with tenure-track faculty.) In regard to the idea of moving to a system in which departments would solicit letters of evaluation from research students—a proposal that the committee has been considering—Professor Clotfelter said that one faculty member had spoken in favor of this idea, and that no reservations had been expressed. The committee decided to bring a proposal forward at the May 26 faculty meeting that, on an annual basis, departments be required to solicit, after final grades, confidential annual letters from all research students who were supervised by a tenure-track professor for 240 hours (the equivalent of six weeks of full-time work) or more at the end of the summer of the academic year in which the research experience took place and before the start of the next academic year. Under the proposal, annual letters from research students would become part of the candidate’s dossier at the time of reappointment and tenure. In addition, at the time of the reappointment and tenure review, departments would be required to solicit, after students have received final grades, confidential “retrospective” letters of evaluation from all research students who were supervised by a tenure-track professor for 240 hours or more. The members proposed this criterion for annual and retrospective letters as a means of ensuring that evaluations are solicited only from students who have had an experience of sufficient depth to be able to evaluate the professor who has supervised them. Thus, most summer research students and a limited number of students employed during the academic year would be asked to write letters, it was noted. Under the proposal, annual letters from research students and retrospective letters would be summarized in the departmental recommendation at the time of reappointment and tenure, a redacted version of which is

shared with the candidate. Candidates would not be provided with the letters themselves. The members agreed to place a motion about letters from research students on the agenda for the commencement faculty meeting on May 26.

The committee also recounted that the issue of joint appointments came up during the meeting with the tenure-track faculty. Colleagues praised the provost office's recent efforts to formalize the expectations for these positions—for example, regarding advising loads—to create greater clarity and to ensure consistency across departments. It was noted that these efforts have included meeting with chairs of departments with jointly appointed tenure-track faculty to discuss these appointments, which was seen as encouraging. The provost said that she anticipates putting a formal policy in place for joint appointments soon—creating a memorandum of understanding. Continuing with the summary, a member noted that, at the meeting, a concern had been raised about a department not following the procedures for the observation of classes that are in place for tenure-track faculty. The provost said that tenure-track faculty with this concern should reach out to their chair or to her. She stressed that arranging for these observations is the responsibility of the chair. On a related front, Provost Epstein said that she would remind departments to follow the procedures outlined in their department handbooks. In addition, she said that emphasis will be placed next year on trying to standardize mentoring practices across departments.

The members next decided that, given that it has been agreed that the Tenure and Promotion Committee (TPC) comprise five voting members, whereas the Committee of Six had six such members, they would bring a proposal forward that a requirement be put in place that at least four members of the TPC must review each reappointment and tenure case. It was agreed that, if approved by the faculty, this procedure should go into effect immediately. In addition, the members decided to propose that, in cases where two or more members of the TPC are required to abstain from discussion and voting in tenure cases because they come from the same department as the candidate, or for any other reason, alternate TPC members would be seated with voice and vote together with regular members of the committee for the session in which the candidate is discussed and the session in which the candidates are compared and a final vote taken. The alternates would be drawn from the TPC ballot, with the first alternate being the first runner-up, etc., excluding faculty members from the candidate's department.

Discussion turned to [a letter from six faculty members expressing concerns about Workday Student](#), the process by which it is being implemented, and the ways in which they feel that Workday may change the process of advising in ways that will not be beneficial to students. The members commented that it is important to learn if there is evidence that Workday Student, which has not yet been implemented, will lead to the consequences that the letter-writers suggest. Provost Epstein noted that, while Workday Student will not be a perfect solution, she does not believe that its use will prevent faculty members from advising students in the ways that they have traditionally. All faculty will need to move to this system, she noted, as it will be operational, and the old system is no longer viable. The provost reminded the members that the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Workday Student and the Faculty Computer Committee have been kept informed about the progress on Workday Student on an ongoing basis and have been provided with regular opportunities to learn about the system. There will also be opportunities to tweak the system in the future, as issues are identified, the provost said. The members stressed the importance of providing to the faculty as much information and training about Workday Student as possible. Provost Epstein said that, in addition to departmental training sessions, plans are in place to provide robust opportunities for faculty to learn the ins and outs of Workday Student and to receive support to prepare them to advise students. For example, plans call for the registrar's office to offer live help for faculty during new-student advising and during the add/drop period via Zoom, she noted.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Umphrey, who has not yet interacted with Workday Student, said that it is important to address the concern of the colleagues who sent the letter—as adopting new software should not drive a reimagination of advising, if that is what is, in fact, going to happen. Professor Clotfelter commented that one concern is that anomaly reports, which are available in the current system, will not be a feature of Workday Student at this time. These reports list courses for which a student has registered that were not on the list of courses approved by the advisor; these reports are very helpful to advisors. Some members commented that Workday Student will provide a degree-audit function that will be helpful to departments, as it will allow for the tracking of the completion of major requirements. It was

noted that, at present, there is a pilot under way with some departments using Workday Student to track major requirements. Provost Epstein commented that there is an expectation that all departments and programs that wish to track major requirements through Workday Student will be able to do so, though it may take a year or two for the registrar's office to implement this function of the new system.

Professor Vaughan asked how Workday Student will be assessed and how faculty will be involved. The provost responded that the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on the Implementation of Workday Student will stay in place for at least a year, serving—along with the Faculty Computer Committee—as a venue for faculty to share suggestions and concerns. A member stressed the importance of communicating to the faculty a clear process for sharing suggestions and concerns. Provost Epstein thanked the committee and said that she would speak with Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, and Sarah Barr, advisor to the provost on campus initiatives and director of community engagement, about the matters that have been raised.

The members decided to approve the motions on the agenda for the faculty meeting of May 17 and the faculty meeting agenda itself via the committee's drive. (On May 11, the members voted five in favor and zero opposed on each of the motions and five in favor and zero opposed to forward the agenda to the faculty. One member was unavailable to vote.)

The committee then turned to [the report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Evaluate the January Term](#). While the ad hoc committee decided not to bring a motion forward to have a January term in 2023, taking into account (among other factors) issues of staffing, its members suggested that a January Term pilot be considered for three years (2024–2026). The committee praised the creative and thorough work of the ad hoc committee and expressed enthusiasm for the ideas that were discussed in the report. Provost Epstein said that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has decided to discuss these suggestions next year. In addition, the members expressed the view that the Faculty Executive Committee should also take up this issue. The members then turned to a personnel matter.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty