

The ninth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2021–2022 was called to order by President Martin via Zoom at 9:30 A.M. on Thursday, November 11, 2021. Present, 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 Provost Epstein noting that she had recently sent an email to all tenured faculty announcing *Pathways Post Tenure*, a new program that her office has designed to help mid- to late-career faculty make the most of the post-tenure years. As noted in the announcement, the results of the 2020 COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) faculty job satisfaction survey and ensuing conversations revealed a range of challenges that associate professors, in particular, along with full professors, can face. The goal of the program will be to help address some of these issues.

Under “Questions from Committee Members, Professor Clotfelter asked if a decision has been made about whether January term will continue beyond this academic year. Provost Epstein said that, while no decision has been made yet, it is clear that there are challenges with offering a robust January term. Only a handful of faculty who taught a January term last year want to do so again, which was unexpected, and it has been difficult to find other faculty who are interested as well. In addition, registrars at the Five-College institutions have been unable to develop a system that will allow Five-College students to register for Amherst’s January term, despite repeated efforts. A decision about the future of January term will be made after the upcoming one is completed and an evaluation can be done of the 2021 and 2022 iterations, the provost said.

Conversation turned to a proposal from the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) for the 2022–2023 academic calendar ([see the letter from the CEP and the details of the proposed calendar](#)). Provost Epstein reviewed the proposal briefly, noting that the fall semester would begin on August 31, 2022, and end on December 16, 2022, under the plan. These dates balance the need to keep Amherst’s start date closely coordinated with those of the other Five-College institutions with the desire not to have exams during the fourth week of December. This end time would allow students to travel home for winter break without running into the busy holiday season, she commented. The provost noted that the final exam period in December would be reduced to four days, instead of the usual five, under the plan—preserving two weekdays (and a weekend) for reading period, while ending exams on a Friday. Some members expressed some concern that a shorter exam period could lead to exam conflicts for students. It was noted that such conflicts have been a problem this year. Provost Epstein commented that, at present, the college does not have sufficient staffing to offer self-scheduled exams. It is hoped that in the 2022–2023 academic year, the option of self-scheduled exams will be reinstated, alleviating exam-scheduling conflicts on the order of what has been experienced this fall. Professor Umphrey commented that meeting the needs of students who qualify for accommodations has presented serious challenges, and she suggested that it would be very helpful to have a testing center where exams are proctored, particularly during a four-day exam period.

Turning to the proposal for the spring semester, Provost Epstein noted that it would begin on January 30, 2023, and end on May 19, 2023, under the proposal. The provost said that, to address the long period of time during the spring without a break, the plan includes a two-day break in April, in addition to the usual week-long break in March that is coordinated with the other colleges. There would be one make-up day, two weekdays (and a weekend) for reading period, and the standard five-day final exam period. Reducing the number of make-up days would mean that the semester would not be extended to accomplish the plan, and that commencement would take place after the typical number of weeks in the term. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez asked what percentage of classes have exams. The provost said that she would find out. (It was later confirmed that 18 percent of humanities courses, 12 percent of social sciences courses, and 71 percent of STEM courses make use of exams). A member commented that January term is not built into the proposal and wondered why. The provost responded that the faculty only approved a January term for the last academic year and for the current one. There

is no legislation enabling the practice to continue, which is why the proposed calendar doesn't have a January term. There is also not sufficient time to debate adopting January term on an ongoing basis, and have a calendar approved soon (which is a very urgent need at this point). The college would need to amend policy and make decisions on how a permanent January term should work, which is not a small task. The committee agreed that the calendar that has been proposed is worth trying, despite some lingering concern about the four-day exam period; the committee then voted unanimously to approve the calendar and forward it to the faculty.

The meeting concluded with a brief discussion of whether another faculty meeting is needed this semester. After some discussion, the members agreed that, after a challenging fall semester, many would welcome not having a meeting, unless there is some business to conduct. Since it appears that there is not, it was agreed that, unless something comes up, there will not be another faculty meeting, and that the academic calendar should be approved by electronic vote. Professor Vaughan once again thanked the provost for organizing a faculty party on November 12, commenting that this will be a time when faculty can engage with one another socially, which is always a welcome experience after faculty meetings. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 11:14 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty