

The eighth 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, November 8, 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 the committee agreeing, as suggested by Professor Hall, to share via its minutes an April 15, 2021, [letter that the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid \(FCAFA\) had sent to the Committee of Six](#) to encourage the faculty to consider the permanent elimination of admission preferences for children of alumni (“legacies”). President Martin and Provost Epstein had spoken with Professor Hall last spring and had agreed that the document should not be shared at that time because the board of trustees was still making its own determination about this matter (ultimately, the board voted to eliminate admission preferences for children of alumni at its most recent meeting, which took place in October).

Turning to another matter, the president and provost informed the members that, after considering the feedback of the Committee of Six and others about the housing committee’s proposal that owners of college houses be allowed to stay in their houses for life, they have decided that a limit of up to six years after retirement from Amherst seems best. With this change, the housing committee’s proposal will now be put in place.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” the committee asked the provost to comment on the issues raised in a [November 6, 2021, letter sent by Professor Gentzler](#); in the document, Professor Gentzler, former faculty director of the Writing Center, expressed concern about plans (as described in recent articles in the *Amherst Student*) to focus the work of the center on one-on-one tutorials in which the staff work with students on academic writing. The members asked if resources for the writing center have been reduced, since some programs have apparently been eliminated. Provost Epstein reassured the committee that no cuts have been made, and shared her view that the core mission of the Writing Center should be to support students’ writing within the curriculum. The provost noted that, over the years, the center’s mission has become more diffuse, with staff dedicating time to other initiatives. While commenting that these other endeavors have been valuable and appreciated, the provost explained that there is high demand among students for services at the Writing Center, and she wants to be sure that appointments are available when students need them. Provost Epstein explained that the center tends to be used very heavily in the fall, when many instructors of first-year seminars encourage their students to make use of its services; the spring is less busy. She said that she has been working with Jessica Kem, director of the Writing Center, to streamline processes and better align staff time with student demand.

Continuing with the discussion, Provost Epstein expressed the view that support for writing outside the curriculum should be provided through other offices. Students should be seeking help with their non-academic writing—e.g., writing relating to applications for internships and jobs or fellowships—through offices such as the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning and the Office of Fellowships, in her view. She has also been in conversation with Liz Agosto, dean of students and interim chief student affairs officer, about providing opportunities for students to focus on study skills and metacognitive approaches, as there is currently an unmet need for these services. The members suggested that it would be helpful for the provost to work with the Writing Center on ways to share information with students about its services, as well as finding ways to communicate about services to support writing that are available through other offices for students. Provost Epstein agreed to discuss the concerns that have been raised with J. Kem and to engage in conversation with Professor Gentzler as well. The members suggested that the provost work with J. Kem to define the ways in which the Writing Center’s plans intersect with and support anti-racism efforts, as they found the current framing in need of refinement. Concluding the discussion, the committee noted the important impact that Professor Gentzler has had through her work to support and enhance writing at that college and expressed thanks to her for sharing her views.

Professor Schroeder Rodríguez next shared that he and Professor del Moral had met with Provost Epstein recently about the possibility of allocating FTE lines for a cluster hire to staff the Latinx and Latin American studies program and an envisioned program in Asian American studies. Given that the five FTE lines provided by the board of trustees previously for the purpose of bringing Black and Latinx senior hires to the college are expected to be allocated by the end of this academic year, he inquired whether it might be possible for the board to allocate more lines for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) faculty as part of the envisioned cluster hire. President Martin asked how many faculty members are teaching in the Latinx and Latin American studies program at this time. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez responded that there are five faculty members who serve as the core of the program and a number of additional colleagues who teach courses that can be applied toward the major. The president explained that the faculty FTE cap has already been breached as part of the priorities that were set for the Promise comprehensive campaign, which include expanding the faculty through the allocation of additional FTE lines in STEM and other disciplines. These lines cannot be filled, however, until the funds that must be raised to support them are in place, the president noted. In order to provide additional lines for the purposes that Professor Schroeder Rodríguez has outlined, more funds would need to be raised and be in place.

Continuing with questions, Professor Clotfelter, referencing the October 31 [email from Dean Agosto](#) about student testing compliance going below 90 percent, asked whether consequences have been put in place for students who are not adhering to the college's rules about COVID-19 testing. President Martin commented that the Office of Student Affairs is doing a good job of holding students accountable for not following testing protocols. There are two groups of students who are not following the rules, she noted, those who haven't been in compliance on a consistent basis (a little more than twenty students), and those who have missed a test here and there (about 50 percent of students). Those in the former group will be going through the college's judicial process, the president said. In addition, students who have not been following testing rules consistently are not being allowed access to a variety of college activities. For example, they are not permitted to host or attend parties. Varsity athletes who are in season and who do not follow testing protocols are not being permitted to attend practices and games. These measures seem to be having a positive effect, the provost noted, as student testing compliance has risen to about 90 percent. Faculty members are encouraged to remind students about the importance of testing, she noted. Professor Clotfelter also inquired as to whether students will be receiving COVID vaccine boosters this spring. Provost Epstein said that she would inquire about the college's plans. (She later said that plans are under way to have a booster clinic for students in early December [boosters would be available for faculty and staff as well], and that there are no plans to require boosters at this time.)

Professor Umphrey next asked for an update on the work of consultant Susan Pierce, who is helping the college think through issues surrounding shared governance and service at the college. Provost Epstein responded that she had just spoken with S. Pierce, who agreed to meet with the committee on November 29 to discuss responses to the survey that was conducted to learn more about the faculty's views on a number of questions, which last year's Committee of Six had helped to develop. The provost said that the committee will be asked to consider next steps, based on what has been learned. Having reviewed the survey results, the provost noted that the views expressed by the faculty vary widely on the issues that the survey raised.

Turning to another topic, Professor Umphrey thanked the provost for her responsiveness to the committee's suggestion that there be more in-person social events for faculty. She said that she is looking forward to the provost's party, which will be held in a tent next to the Inn on Boltwood, on November 12. Provost Epstein said that she is excited about the party, while apologizing that the event will take place at the same time as a [lecture by Geoffrey Stone](#), Edward H. Levi Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, which is part of the Point/Counterpart series. The provost said that she was not aware of this conflict when scheduling the party. The talk, which is open to all, will be

live-streamed. A recording of the event will be made available afterward. The members then turned briefly to a committee assignment

At the conclusion of the meeting, discussion returned to [a note from Professor Grobe](#). In his communication, Professor Grobe raised concern about the last paragraph of the tenure criteria language in the [Faculty Handbook III. E., 3.](#), which reads as follows:

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).

Ahead of the committee's meeting, the members were provided with minutes of the board of trustees' vote on this issue in 1992 and relevant faculty meeting and Committee of Six minutes. It was noted that many of the arguments that faculty members had made against adopting this language, at the time, hold true today. President Martin noted once again that this type of clause, which allows the board to take extraordinary measures in the face of exigent circumstances, is fairly standard at colleges and universities. At the same time, she agrees with the committee that the placement of the language in the tenure criteria section of the *Faculty Handbook*, and some of the substance that is conveyed, is problematic. Professor Clotfelter asked if "institutional considerations" must continue to encompass both financial factors, as well as others such as departmental structure, as these are very different things. Professor Martini said that she found the examples of factors described in the language to be very odd, with the emphasis on fields and rank structure, for example.

President Martin commented that these contingencies do not make sense in the current context, noting that it is not the role of the board to intervene in tenure decisions, or hiring, for that matter; the current language is out of sync with the ways in which Amherst's board operates, she said. At the time that the language was adopted, a requirement that faculty retire by age seventy was about to be lifted. It could be that some of the language was included to address fears that departments could become "top heavy" as a result of the change. It was agreed and noted that such considerations should be taken into account by the Committee on Educational Policy and the president and provost when FTEs are allocated, but not at the time of tenure. All this being said, the president noted that the trustees, in the event of a financial crisis, must have the ability to take whatever steps that are necessary to preserve the institution, and language to this effect needs to be in the *Faculty Handbook*. It must be recognized that, in the case of a dire set of circumstances, such actions could encompass decisions surrounding the number of faculty lines that could continue to be supported. It was agreed that the president and provost should draft language surrounding financial exigency and board decisions and bring a proposal to the trustees to revise the current language. In addition, it was agreed that they should make a recommendation as to where the new language should be placed in the *Faculty Handbook*, removing it from the tenure criteria section. The committee thanked the president and the provost for their willingness to move this issue forward. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 4:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty