

The eleventh 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, October 12, 2020. 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.

The meeting began with Provost Epstein informing the members that she has requested that all academic departments develop departmental handbooks, with the goal of documenting their procedures and practices. Among these are the ways in which departmental decisions are made, tenure-track faculty are mentored and evaluated, budgets are prepared and funds are allocated, and staff are supervised. The provost commented that making departmental processes more transparent will be particularly helpful to tenure-track faculty members. She has asked that departments aim to have at least part of their handbooks done by this summer. Professor Trapani expressed strong support for this project, but added that many faculty members are overburdened, given the extra demands that the pandemic has brought; as a result, they may find it challenging to find time to work on this important handbook. Professor Kingston wondered if one goal of the project is to move toward greater consistency of departmental procedures and practices across the college—which he feels would be desirable. In this context, he asked Provost Epstein how it is envisaged that the handbooks will be employed once they are completed. The provost responded that she and the faculty equity and inclusion officers will review the documents, in an effort to gain a better sense of the range of departmental practices and procedures, before determining next steps. It is her hope that it may be possible to develop some best practices that would span all departments.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Umphrey, noting [the president’s email to the community](#) about the discovery that swastikas had been carved into a table at the Book and Plow Farm, asked whether any more has been learned about this very troubling incident. President Martin said that nothing more is known at this time, but that John Carter, chief of police and director of public safety, will continue to investigate the matter.

Continuing with questions, Professor Trapani said that he wonders to what degree students understand that part of the purpose of wearing a mask is to protect others, as well as themselves. He is concerned that some individuals are not wearing masks in the science center, including early in the morning. They may feel it is not necessary to do so in empty spaces when not many other people are around, he believes. In the interest of everyone’s health and safety, messaging should be enhanced, in his view; it should be conveyed that the virus likely remains for a period after individuals have vacated an indoor area, that faculty and staff are here for the students, and that all members of the community should take care to protect each other. Professor Trapani commented that increased signage in the science center would be welcome. President Martin agreed that, with colder weather approaching, it will be important to reemphasize the need to wear masks at all times, except when eating. She said that she would speak with Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations, about installing signage in the science center and other campus buildings.

The members turned next to a discussion of the October 6 faculty meeting, focusing on what they could learn from the committee-of-the-whole conversation, and next steps in their effort to bring forward a proposal to amend the [Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#). [A couple of letters from faculty members](#) that had been sent just before the faculty meeting informed the committee’s discussion. Professor Kingston said that he feels that the committee made the right decision in taking the approach of having a committee-of-the-whole discussion, despite the fraught nature of some of the exchanges that had occurred among colleagues, insofar as there had been an open discussion that had allowed divergent and strongly held views to be aired openly as part of a transparent process. While he had felt that having conversations in small groups prior to having an open discussion could have privileged certain voices, he supports doing so as a follow-up to the conversation that took place at the faculty meeting.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Umphrey commented that, as it turned out, very little had been said in the first half of the faculty meeting about the committee's proposed language, and she worries that some of what transpired resulted in some damage to faculty governance and comity. Without the possibility of on-campus conversation, it can be difficult to move through and past these kinds of abrasions, Professor Umphrey fears. She noted the challenge of speaking on Zoom and how much harder it is to make use of informal person-to-person connections when processing proposals and discussions. Professor Umphrey suggested creating a forum for written comments, which could be sent either directly to the Committee of Six, or made available to all faculty—both before and after faculty meetings. She also wonders if the faculty might consider adopting some speaking norms to create more order, which might include asking colleagues to speak for no more than two minutes, and to speak directly to the motion or issue. Professor Umphrey also proposed asking colleagues to speak to the chair, rather than addressing other faculty members. In her view, it might be useful to have only the speaker and the chair visible in the video feed. The purpose of the proposed changes that she had described would not be to constrain the expression of strong opinions, but to keep discussions focused and on track—so that things can get done, Professor Umphrey noted. She commented on the fragility of the current environment, and the importance of connection and care.

Professor Leise, noting that any group of more than eight-or-so people speaking on Zoom together presents difficulties in regard to engaging in discussion, expressed the view that the same issues that were raised in the faculty meeting would likely also have come up in small-group discussions. She stressed the need to find ways to have conversation in which everyone can speak freely. In her view, it is particularly important that tenure-track faculty members feel comfortable speaking at faculty meetings, including when they have controversial things to say, without the fear that tenured faculty will criticize them. Professor Umphrey expressed hope that some cultural change will come via the implementation of restorative practices.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Kingston said that he would be in favor of soliciting written commentary about the language that the committee has proposed to amend the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom, as Professor Umphrey has suggested, in the hope of receiving thoughtful and productive feedback. He feels that such feedback ought not to be anonymous. The members discussed the possibility of making use of a Google drive, Moodle, or Slack channel to gather feedback from the faculty. Professor Manion expressed the view that it would be constructive to solicit faculty members' proposals for an amendment to the statement. Professor Trapani said that, reflecting on what was shared at the faculty meeting, he feels he has learned a great deal, outside the tense and hurtful moments that had occurred. While he regrets the way in which the discussion unfolded, he feels that it was important for both the committee and the faculty as a whole to hear the different views that were expressed. Professor Kingston said that he has learned a great deal as well. In particular, it appeared that, while the committee's intention had been to make a modest and limited revision to the statement to prohibit egregious racist behavior, the proposed language—particularly the word “targeted”—was not read in this way. Some colleagues interpreted the proposal as broad and sweeping, and supported it. Others also read it that way, and raised significant concern. Professor Kingston noted that examples offered at the faculty meeting of behavior that might be limited if the committee's language were to be added to the statement—for example, the idea that someone might feel targeted in the presence of a person wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat, or that faculty would not be allowed to teach material that students may find offensive—were not what the members had intended. It was agreed that the language of the proposal needs to be reworked to offer greater clarity to convey the committee's intentions.

Reflecting further on the discussion at the faculty meeting, some members of the committee noted that the idea that had been advanced that no harm has taken place in the classroom under

the current Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom had been particularly divisive. President Martin commented that faculty, staff, and students have reported experiencing harm as a result of racial epithets and other demeaning slurs, for example. It seems these statements led to emotional responses that were not only focused on the proposal to amend the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom. Instead, they were about deeper and more fundamental issues. Professor Umphrey said that she continues to believe that it would be preferable to amend the non-discrimination and harassment policy and/or [the Statement on Respect for Persons](#), rather than the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom. President Martin reiterated that the Statement on Respect for Persons functions as a college value statement and is not a formal policy. The proposed non-discrimination and harassment policy, however, will provide a policy under which claims of bias can be brought under Title VI.

Professor Leise suggested that the committee move forward on two fronts—proposing a narrowly aimed amendment to the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom, and a larger effort directed at anti-racism work more broadly, with the goal of changing Amherst’s culture. Provost Epstein suggested that it would have been helpful if the faculty could have been provided with the finalized bias-reporting and response protocol before the discussion of the committee’s amendment to the statement, to better understand the relationship between the statement and the protocol. Professor Trapani inquired as to whether it would be useful to consult with experts on academic freedom and its relationship to anti-racist work, in order to have some guidance before developing language to bring forward to the faculty. He fears that soliciting written comments via some kind of online forum might result in a replication of the discussion that took place at the faculty meeting, especially if they are seen by all faculty, which could result in colleagues responding to one another’s comments. If the committee does create a forum for faculty comments, he suggested that it might be helpful to share readings about academic freedom to inform the conversation. Professor Umphrey proposed that, given the urgency of the moment, it would be best for the committee to work on the language of the amendment to the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom, and to bring a new proposal forward as soon as possible. There could then be a transition in focus to substantive anti-racism work. Professor del Moral concurred. She said that she recognizes Professor Manion’s frustration that the focus seems to be on process, while at the same time noting the anti-racism efforts that are already under way—for example the provost’s lecture series, the development of the bias-reporting and response protocol and restorative practices, the interim non-discrimination and harassment policy, and the efforts of the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, on which she serves. In her view, these initiatives will contribute to the robust anti-racism work to come.

Further discussion of how the language of the committee’s proposed amendment to the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom might be revised revealed some differing views as to the goal of the amendment, most prominently the degree to which course content should be protected. The committee then decided that the best course would be for the members to gain greater clarity about what an amendment should seek to address. To this end, the members decided to review the request from the Black Student Union to amend the statement, the draft of the interim non-discrimination and harassment policy, a final draft of the bias-reporting and response protocol (if it is available), and material relating to academic freedom that had been provided to the committee previously, including the academic freedom statements of peer institutions that Professor Umphrey assembled. Rather than discussing these pieces in isolation, the committee agreed that it would be most helpful to have a holistic conversation to inform its thinking about how best to move forward. The members agreed to do so at their next meeting.

The members next reviewed a draft agenda for a possible faculty meeting on October 20. Provost Epstein first provided the committee with a response to Professor Trapani’s question about one aspect of [the Committee on Educational Policy \(CEP\)’s proposal to revise the course](#)

[requirements policy](#). Referring to the paragraph on making up course credits that the CEP proposes to strike from the policy, Professor Trapani had asked whether students would be allowed to take two half courses to make up course credits toward graduation, if the failed course is not a requirement of the major. He had also wondered if such half courses are sufficiently available across the curriculum to provide all students with this option, or whether some students would be advantaged, depending on their major or ability to play an instrument, for example. According to Provost Epstein, the CEP said that all students have the option of taking half courses and combining them to make up a limited number of deficiencies, noting that this is documented on the registrar's website. Some CEP members think that the equity question is more complicated, but had concluded that all Amherst students should be capable of taking half courses, which don't have prerequisites and are available in both humanities and STEM subjects. Professor Trapani noted that it would be preferable to state explicitly in this part of the course requirements section that two half courses may be used to make up course credits toward graduation, if a failed course is not a requirement of the major—even though this policy appears elsewhere. Otherwise, under the CEP's revision, it could appear that all failed courses cannot be made up at Amherst. He would not insist on this revision, however, he said.

The members then voted six in favor and zero opposed on the substance of [the proposal to establish an education studies major at the college](#), which would be administered as a program and begin in the academic year 2021–2022. The members then voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward the proposal to the faculty. The committee turned next to the other proposals forwarded by the CEP, and discussed previously (and, in the case of one, at today's meeting), to revise catalog language surrounding some academic policies. These policies focus on [the adoption of a new pass/fail option](#) that, if passed, would replace the flexible grading option (FGO); a revision (shown in red [in the linked document](#)) to the readmission policy; a revision ([shown in red in the linked document](#)) to the policy on academic credit from other institutions; and changes ([shown in red in the linked document](#)) to the course requirements section of the *Amherst College Catalog*. In the case of each proposal, the members voted six in favor and zero opposed on content, and six in favor and zero opposed to forward the proposals to the faculty. If approved, all of the proposals would be effective on July 1, 2021. The committee then voted six in favor and zero opposed to forward the faculty meeting agenda to the faculty.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of [a letter sent to the committee by Professor Hunter-Parker](#). The members noted that Professor Hunter-Parker expressed concern that the college seems to see care-giving during the pandemic as a personal choice, rather than as a structural challenge. Professor Kingston commented that Professor Hunter-Parker doesn't seem to be requesting particular action items, but primarily to be seeking greater acknowledgment of the challenges that care-givers are facing in this unprecedented time. She is also conveying that the measures that the college is taking in response are not sufficient. Professor del Moral noted that Professor Hunter-Parker also expresses fear that, at the time of reappointment and tenure, the college will not be mindful of the hardships that the pandemic caused to care-givers, and the impact that it has had on teaching and research productivity.

The members discussed Professor Hunter-Parker's view that the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Structures during COVID-19 have put tenure-track faculty in the difficult position of having to advocate for their interests, since requests for course reduction must come from them. This would not be the case, she suggests, if the college provided "uniform course reduction for untenured faculty." Professor Trapani agreed that an approach that requires faculty to make requests to the provost for relief from hardship on an individual basis seems deeply problematic, particularly for tenure-track faculty. He suggested that there could be an institution-wide policy that would grant course relief to all faculty who have significant care-giving responsibilities at home, with an allowance that those who choose to forgo the relief would be

noted and possibly credited a half-semester toward their tenure clock, for example. In this way, tenure-track colleagues would not have to navigate potential departmental politics to gain relief, while others may still choose to teach despite the challenge of care-giving, knowing they are helping the college and their departments during this exceptional moment. Provost Epstein responded that, last spring there were multiple channels available for tenure-track faculty to make known their need for a rebalancing of their teaching loads. In addition, she does not believe that the college could mount its curriculum if such a policy were adopted. Already, staffing certain areas of the curriculum is a challenge at this time.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Umphrey asked what the effect would be, as a budgetary and curricular matter, if the college did grant course release across the board for all faculty with children. She expressed concern about the impact of the pandemic on faculty members' research productivity and teaching, and also noted its impact on publishing within the humanities. Provost Epstein said that all candidates for reappointment and tenure and their departments have been asked to document the impact of COVID-19 on research, teaching, and service. This will be the case annually going forward. In addition, outside reviewers will also be asked to document the impact of the pandemic on candidates' disciplines. Professor Trapani said that, depending on the reviewer, the impact and implications of COVID-19 on a candidate's scholarship may be addressed in different ways, which could be problematic depending on the reviewer's institution, location, and personal perspective during the pandemic. Professor Manion, who served on the ad hoc committee, noted that tenure-track faculty had requested that the ad hoc committee not take the approach of recommending that the college lower its expectations for research productivity, due to the impact of the pandemic. Essentially, the committee was told that lowering research expectations would potentially harm tenure-track faculty members' careers and create more stress for these colleagues, and that it would be best to add additional time to the tenure clock instead, Professor Manion noted. Perhaps this view should be reconsidered, she commented. Provost Epstein responded that, while she thinks that a universal course release for tenure-track faculty and/or all faculty with young children would likely not be feasible, she feels that it is important to gather data about this matter. The provost said that she would solicit information from Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, and provide the data to the committee at its next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty