

The sixth 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, October 18, 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 a discussion of a personnel matter. Provost Epstein next noted that, after consultation with the Committee on Educational Policy, it has been agreed that Amherst will return to its usual policy regarding closing due to inclement weather, i.e., that, when the college closes, all classes will be cancelled. The policy was introduced in 2015, in order to ensure that students, faculty, and staff are not put at risk by venturing out on icy pathways or roads, Provost Epstein explained. In addition, she said that it is essential that facilities crews are able to work without interference to reopen the campus as safely and quickly as possible. Synchronous teaching via Zoom will not be allowed on snow days, the provost noted. The primary reason for this is that students' living situations can make it very challenging for them to participate in Zoom classes; on snow days, the library and other academic buildings will be closed, so students will not be able to find other spaces from which they can Zoom into class. The provost commented that the classroom is a privileged space in which open and honest conversation is expected; with non-participants potentially present, the classroom cannot function as intended. Provost Epstein explained that, while synchronous teaching on snow days will not be permitted, faculty may share recorded lectures or have students participate in Moodle or other asynchronous discussion formats.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Umphrey asked about the performance of Amherst's endowment and what the college's budgetary priorities are for the coming budget cycle. President Martin said that the endowment returns have been extraordinary. She then discussed her strategic priorities for the use of the increase to the payout to the budget from the endowment. Rather than waiting until spring when the budget process typically begins, she has decided to fund a number of strategic priorities now, she noted, so as to ensure that requests that are less strategic do not end up crowding out higher-priority investments. These are significant enhancements to the college's financial aid program that will benefit all aided students ([see the announcement that the president sent to the community on October 20](#)), beginning in 2022–2023; converting long-serving casual positions at the college that involve more than twenty hours of work a week into benefitted positions; expanding faculty research support via an increase in the number of research internships for students and a significant start on the commitment that was made earlier to provide lab technicians to faculty members in STEM fields. In addition, President Martin said that it is also her hope to add 1 percentage point to the regular faculty and staff wage pools that will be set in spring 2022, so that employees can make up some of the ground they have lost over time by virtue of not having received a wage increase during part of the pandemic. This last step will not be taken until the spring, when it will be determined whether it is possible. President Martin also informed the members, in confidence, that the college will end the practice of having a legacy admission preference, beginning with the next admission cycle. She noted that the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid, the leadership of the college, and the Amherst College Board of Trustees have endorsed doing so. The members expressed enthusiasm for all of these initiatives. (President Martin shared this information at the faculty meeting the next day.) [An article on the college's expanded financial aid program and ending the legacy preference appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on October 20.](#)

Continuing with questions, Professor Clotfelter asked when the exam schedule will be shared. Provost Epstein said that she would check in with the registrar to find out. At the request of Professor Manion, the president next provided a brief update on the searches for the chief financial and administrative officer and the chief human resources officer, noting that the searches are moving forward. Provost Epstein informed the committee that a third candidate for the position of chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer will come to campus on Friday of this week. A session will once again be offered for faculty to meet the candidate, she said.

Professor Schroeder Rodríguez next commented that he was looking forward to the discussion about student well-being that would take place at the faculty meeting the next day, in particular to learn more about how best to support students. He noted that a colleague had suggested that it would also be useful to provide venues in which faculty and staff could discuss the challenges that they have faced during the pandemic. Some members wondered if the Center for Restorative Practices might facilitate such conversations. On a related front, Professor Umphrey asked the provost if it might be possible to provide a space for colleagues to gather to share their experiences, perhaps over lunch. While this may not be possible at Lewis-Sebring, since that space has been needed during this time for student dining, perhaps another location could be found. Faculty could bring their own lunches, since dining services is so stretched, she noted. Provost Epstein said that she would explore the possibilities with Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations. Concluding the conversation and returning to the issue of student mental health, Professor Vaughan suggested that it would be helpful for faculty to receive more information about what to do when their students are in distress. Provost Epstein said that faculty should reach out to the class deans, the dean of students, and/or the Counseling Center. The meeting concluded with a discussion of a personnel matter.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty