

The twelfth 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 19, 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 President Martin informing the members that the meetings of the board of trustees, which had taken place over the course of the previous week via Zoom, had gone very well. The trustees had expressed tremendous appreciation for the extraordinary efforts of the faculty and staff during this challenging time. The president said that the trustees view two presentations by faculty and students as the highlight of their meetings. Professors Bailey, Durr, and Edwards and several of their students discussed [the STEM Incubator Program](#), and Professors Kunichika, Sitze, and Umphrey spoke about [Ailing States](#), a colloquium they are co-teaching this semester that focuses on the history of plague narratives and how they relate to governance and the state. Several students in the course also shared their experience. Also as part of the board meetings, Provost Epstein reported on the results of the academic portions of surveys that had recently been administered separately to students and faculty about the experience of teaching and learning this semester. The provost said that she would give an overview of these results at the faculty meeting the next day. She noted that both surveys suggest that the academic program is working well, and that the experience of faculty and students has improved since last spring. At the same time, she commented, the results also make clear that the costs to faculty members are enormous, in regard to hours worked, and research time lost. Turning to another matter before concluding her remarks, the president informed the members that, to foster staff participation in the electoral process, time that is taken to vote or work at the polls will be considered regular worked time, and will not be charged against leave accruals.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” the committee discussed [comments that Professor Grobe asked Professor Trapani to share with the members](#). Professor Grobe reported learning of incidents in which students have treated staff with disrespect surrounding the enforcement of COVID-related policies. He expressed the view that on-campus staff face the greatest risk of exposure to COVID-19, and that the faculty should be expressing support for staff colleagues in the face of student misconduct. President Martin said that, when such incidents are reported, steps have been taken, and will continue to be taken, to address this behavior toward staff. Provost Epstein commented that students have tremendous respect for the faculty, and that professors should not leave it to staff alone to intervene when student behavior of this kind is observed. The committee expressed support and admiration for the staff and agreed that addressing student misbehavior is the responsibility of both faculty and staff.

Turning to another topic related to COVID-19 rules, President Martin informed the members that students have been asking the college to relax some of the COVID-19-related rules that are in place. While most rules will remain in effect, she said, two pilot programs are being launched in an effort to help improve students’ on-campus experience. A beer and wine delivery service will soon be made available to students over the age of twenty-one, with the alcohol being delivered to a central location on campus for pick up. Present Martin commented that it is safer to have alcohol delivered than to have students going off campus to buy it, which is not permitted but which likely has been happening. In addition, President Martin said, students will be allowed to reserve common areas in residence halls and to spend time in one another’s rooms (practicing social distancing and wearing masks). The president noted that, with cold weather approaching, students need more indoor spaces in which to socialize. If the two two-week pilots go well, these changes will be extended, President Martin noted.

Continuing with questions, Professor Leise informed the members that several faculty members have contacted her about Mammoth Day, asking her to share their views with the committee. Some colleagues were supportive of holding the event, while others conveyed that it would have been helpful if the faculty had been informed that there would be a general window of time in which Mammoth Day would take place. In this way, faculty could have built flex time into their course scheduling and would not have been caught off guard. Provost Epstein said that she has received a number of emails from faculty who were highly critical of Mammoth Day. Professor Sitze expressed his concerns in [a note that he sent to the Committee of Six](#).

President Martin commented that she had also received messages from faculty, some conveying positive views of Mammoth Day, and others noting concerns. The president said that, while she understands that there was some disruption associated with cancelling classes, which she takes very seriously, she was heartened to see so many students enjoying themselves outdoors on Mammoth Day. At this unprecedented time, it was very important for students to have this much-needed break, which was requested by the COVID-19 Student Task Force. Prior to the meeting, Professor Trapani had shared with the members [an article](#) that had appeared in the *Amherst Student*, emphasizing the importance of a break such as that provided by Mammoth Day. He noted that, while he certainly understands the challenges, some of which were quite large, faced by some faculty when classes were cancelled without notice, he also feels that Mammoth Day was valuable, and much appreciated by students. Professor del Moral said that students have informed her how grateful they were for Mammoth Day. She commented that students should be the priority, and expressed support for Mammoth Day. Other members concurred.

Thinking ahead to the next semester, Provost Epstein informed the members that she will soon ask the Committee on Educational Policy to consider building a few break days into the calendar of the spring semester, since there will not be a spring break this year. One possibility is that Senior Week could be reduced by a day or two, and that these days could instead be used to provide respite earlier in the semester. A change to the spring calendar will require a vote of the faculty, Provost Epstein noted. The members expressed support for this plan.

Conversation turned to a continuation of the committee's discussion of [a letter sent to the members by Professor Hunter-Parker](#). In that note, she shared her views on the impact that the pandemic is having on faculty with children. The provost, prior to the meeting, provided the committee with relevant data to inform the conversation. This information, prepared by Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, spotlighted the consequences for the curriculum of putting in place some of the possible solutions that the members had proposed the previous week—most prominently, the potential effect of granting course releases in spring 2021 to all tenure-track professors and all tenured professors with dependent children who are age twelve or younger.

According to J. Barba, assuming a standard course load of two courses, granting a course release to all assistant professors would remove at least 12 percent of the courses in the spring 2021 catalog (the catalog is already somewhat reduced by the movement of some courses to the January session). Given that spring pre-registration is quickly approaching, he noted that it would be difficult for departments to rearrange their curriculums to cover critical courses that might not be taught if course releases were granted. In addition, he reminded the committee that departments have already submitted their courses, and that the registrar is preparing the catalog for scheduling, advising, and registration. Granting course releases to all assistant professors would also likely require a change to the academic calendar, he noted, as departments would need time to adjust their academic planning, and the registrar would need to restart the process of scheduling the catalog.

J. Barba also informed the members that the curricular effect of such course releases would be felt differentially across departments. His review of spring courses taught by assistant professors suggested that computer science, economics, math, psychology, and statistics would lose several popular courses that also serve as pathways into their majors. In J. Barba's view, practically speaking, course releases might be difficult to grant in some areas, which could create a sense of inequity among assistant professors. Finally, the enrollments from cancelled courses would need to be absorbed elsewhere in the curriculum, he noted. Even assuming that most students would opt for the three-course load recommended by the college this year, his rough estimate is that average section sizes would need to increase by at least three students in the remaining courses. (This projection is based on a rough estimate of expected average section sizes, based on the college's current catalog and a projection for the spring enrollment.) In J. Barba's view, it is unlikely that the shift in enrollments would be shared across the curriculum, which would mean that the experience of this change could be quite different across departments. He noted that surveys of students and faculty, and practical experience, suggest that smaller classes sizes are important to make remote courses effective, so that this increase could work against pedagogical efforts.

In a separate analysis, J. Barba also provided information (by rank, division, and spring 2021 leave status) to the committee about tenure-line faculty with dependent children aged twelve and younger. Granting a single

course release to all tenure-line faculty who have young children would result in logistic, curricular, and pedagogical challenges that resemble those posed by granting a course release to all assistant professors. He noted that, if the college were to combine the two proposals and grant a spring 2021 course release to both all assistant professors and all other tenure-line faculty with children twelve and under, the result would be an 18 percent reduction in spring 2021 course catalog.

In the view of J. Barba, a universal spring course-release policy would be unwise. He described the challenges and costs as daunting and noted that, under such a policy, students' academic choices would be greatly reduced. In some departments, the challenges might simply be insolvable in the time available, he noted. He also said that the academic calendar leaves little time for consultation and planning before students need to register for spring classes.

Concluding his report, J. Barba noted, that, with more time and coordination with departments, it might be possible to grant a single course release to assistant professors that would be spread out over the next several years. While this approach would not solve workload issues during this academic year, it could provide some extra time to focus on research, for example. Finally, J. Barba noted that it is possible that some departments might have the space in their curriculum to grant limited releases this spring, but he argued that spreading out the reductions to the curriculum would alleviate most of the problems he had highlighted. Any such plan would need to be carefully coordinated to ensure that the college could still mount all parts of the curriculum in the coming years, in his view; some use of strategic backfill would also likely be necessary.

The committee expressed thanks to J. Barba for all the work he had done to assemble the information noted above. The members agreed that it is clear from the data that universal course release is not a viable option this spring, given the impact that such a program would have on the curriculum.

The committee discussed whether tenure-track faculty should be the priority when considering course-release and other options to provide additional support during this time. With the view that tenure-track faculty are the most vulnerable, members supported this approach, while noting that tenured faculty who are in distress should contact the provost to explore ways of receiving additional help. The members agreed that, while associate and full professors certainly are experiencing significant challenges, faculty who have not yet achieved tenure face additional pressure and stress, and have a different structural relationship to the college. Professor Kingston suggested that departments be encouraged, where feasible, to allow assistant professors to teach multiple sections of the same course, thus reducing preparation time. His department is providing this opportunity to tenure-track faculty, he noted.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Umphrey proposed giving consideration to the adoption of flexible tenure clocks. Such a system, which some other schools use, she noted, would give tenure-track colleagues greater agency, and build structural flexibility into the tenure process. Faced with significant life events, pressing responsibilities, and other unanticipated situations, tenure-track faculty could have the option of adjusting when they stand for tenure (within a range of years after their initial appointment). Provost Epstein noted that, essentially, Amherst already has a system of this kind in place for faculty parents. Those who take parenting leave, some on multiple occasions before tenure, have the option of standing for tenure in a number of different years. These colleagues are asked to inform the college of their intentions by the spring before the fall of the year in which they wish to stand. Professor Umphrey expressed the view that greater flexibility in the tenure system may also become necessary, due to the state of academic publishing. It is feared that some academic presses may not survive in the years to come, she noted. President Martin said that she does not support the adoption now of a system of flexible tenure clocks, believing that problems of equity could too easily emerge. She suggested waiting to see how the pandemic unfolds, including the effect of COVID-19 on academic presses, rather than trying to predict the future. Based on what happens, the college could extend tenure clocks again, if doing so is considered necessary, the president said.

Professor Trapani stressed the responsibility that the college has to the faculty. He noted that Amherst has been very generous in the support that is providing to students, and that the college should also be creative in developing different forms of support for faculty during this time. For example, he understands that faculty at

UMass, Amherst, who have a full teaching load receive credit toward their next sabbatical. Stipends for childcare might be a welcome form of support for some faculty, he noted. President Martin asked if providing such stipends would be helpful, as the college has heard that, for some, finding childcare providers is more of a challenge than paying for this service. Professor Trapani said that stipends, which could be used flexibly to help faculty manage care-giving responsibilities, and other forms of support, would most importantly represent acknowledgement of the exceptional contributions and dedication of faculty during this exceptional moment. A menu of options would be the most equitable, in his view, as colleagues have been affected by the pandemic in different ways.

In regard to child care, Provost Epstein noted that the college has been considering possible ways to provide additional support to faculty and staff with young children. She noted the challenge of finding high-quality care during this time, and the recognition that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work—as families have a range of needs. The provost informed the members that Lisa Rutherford, chief policy officer and general counsel, in collaboration with the Office of Human Resources, is exploring a number of ideas—beyond what has been made available via [Care.com](#). For example, consideration is being given to offering Amherst students the opportunity to tutor the children of faculty and staff, remotely, which could be very helpful while schools are closed. The provost also reminded the members that there are a small number of slots for children of different ages that are still available at the Woodside Children's Center.

Turning briefly to another issue, the provost noted that Amherst is enrolling U.S. veterans in increasing numbers. As a result, she explained, a [proposed military activation policy](#) is needed to clarify procedures for veterans who are called into obligatory military service, convey a sense of welcome, and bring Amherst into alignment with other colleges. The provost noted that last year's Committee of Six had recommended some small changes to the document, which have now been incorporated. Professor Trapani asked if the college's lawyers have reviewed and approved the policy, which he imagines is in line with legal requirements. Provost Epstein replied in the affirmative.

The members turned next to a discussion of how best to refine the language that the committee intends to propose to amend the [Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#) and related issues. The provost noted that the revised draft of the bias-reporting and response protocol is not yet ready to be given to the committee, but that she expects that the document will be provided to the members before the next Committee of Six meeting. Provost Epstein said that those who are revising the protocol in response to the committee's feedback would like to have a better sense of the members' view of what content should be protected under the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom, so as to align the protocol accordingly. The provost said that, in her view, classroom content should be protected by the statement, and should not fall under the protocol.

Professor Kingston expressed the view that, while considering the committee's proposal to amend the statement, the members should be guided by AAUP guidelines on freedom of expression, which affirm that no viewpoint or idea, however offensive, should be forbidden from being expressed. He disagrees, however, with the AAUP's assertion that "racial or ethnic slurs, sexist epithets, or homophobic insults almost always express ideas." In his view, therefore, while the college should proscribe hateful language, gestures, epithets, and symbols directed against individuals or groups, it should also be made clear that classroom content conveys ideas and therefore cannot be restricted. Professor Trapani said that he is not sure that there should be a blanket statement that all classroom content should be protected, expressing some concern that faculty might be able to mask racist views and targeted racial epithets directed toward students by reading aloud from a racist text, while directing or targeting the delivery toward particular students. He feels that there could be ambiguity surrounding what is meant by classroom "content" and the material chosen to be taught in a classroom. Professor Kingston commented in response that faculty have the freedom to assign texts of any kind, but that the reading of a text in a manner intended to target a particular student would still be seen as harassment. The committee discussed whether, perhaps, it might be preferable to address the restriction of speech directed against individuals or groups in a harassing way through the college's non-discrimination and harassment policy (which is close to being finalized), rather than through an amendment to the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom. Perhaps violations under this policy would allow for greater accountability, it was noted.

In considering this and other possibilities, the committee referred to the academic freedom statements of Harvard, Skidmore, and Reed. It was agreed that the approaches and some of the language used in these statements might provide good models for the amendment that the members are considering. President Martin noted that, while academic freedom statements are not legal policies, there is a good deal of case law that protects academic freedom and faculty members' right to it. She commented that the directed speech, gestures, epithets and symbols that the committee has been considering prohibiting in the statement would also be considered harassment, and would also thus be covered by the non-discrimination and harassment policy. Professor Umphrey noted that framing the problem as one of addressing speech that is directed against individuals or groups in a harassing way solves certain definitional difficulties. Several members felt that linking to the non-discrimination and harassment policy within the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom, as some other institutions do, might be an effective approach. Noting the importance to students of doing so, the president expressed support for proposing a modest amendment to the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom. While preserving what needs to be protected inside and outside the classroom under academic freedom, such an amendment can state explicitly that directed speech that is harassing—which is conduct—is prohibited.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Manion suggested that it would be useful for the committee to develop a better sense of the kinds of moments in which the envisioned policy might be invoked. Amherst-specific examples would be particularly helpful as illustrations, in her view. She wonders what scenarios the Black Student Union (BSU) feel their proposed amendment to the Statement on Academic and Expressive Freedom might remedy. From what she understands, some students might feel that an amendment to the statement could apply to some situations about which the faculty would disagree. President Martin said that, in her discussions with the BSU, she has not gotten the sense that the students want to try to control classroom content. Even if they did, the college would not do so, she noted. The language of the amendment to the statement needs to be very clear on this point, she said. The president also commented that the language of the bias-reporting and response protocol also appears to be protective of academic freedom.

In regard to the suggestion that developing some scenarios would be helpful, President Martin commented that it is impossible to foresee all the ways in which a broad principle can be applied, and that academic freedom cannot be restricted to address specific situations in advance. Professor Manion expressed the view that having examples would provide greater clarity, and that the committee has been thinking about the amendment in ways that are too abstract. The committee discussed whether race should be singled out in the proposed amendment to the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom that it would propose. It was noted that a far-reaching academic freedom statement must live beyond a particular historical moment, and that it would be best not to single out a particular protected category. The protected categories are already established, and the amendment should be applicable to all of the protected groups, Professor Umphrey noted. She agreed that the proposed amendment should prohibit speech that is specifically directed against individuals or groups in a harassing way, but should not seek to determine all the ways in which this restriction would be applied. President Martin commented that the review team that is a feature of the bias-reporting and response protocol would make an initial judgment about what rises to the level of bias or discrimination.

Conversation turned to the bias-reporting and response protocol. Professor Kingston said that it seems to him that the bias-reporting and response protocol lacks "teeth" and seems to be directed toward community building. Professor Umphrey disagreed. She noted that, under the protocol, faculty who are most vulnerable could be called out about content on a syllabus, for example—which could represent a threat to academic freedom by deterring them from teaching potentially challenging materials. It is very important that it be stated explicitly that course content not be covered under the protocol, she noted. Professor Leise wondered if the committee's proposed amendment to the statement, which would be narrowly constructed, could be separated from the bias-reporting and response protocol. Professor Manion said that she found the first draft of the bias-reporting and response protocol to be too vague and is eager to see the revised version. She also said that it is not clear to her what students want redressed under the protocol. President Martin responded that she believes that what students want is to have a process in place so that they know what to do when they feel that offensive things have been said

or done, and they have experienced harm. Again, it is the review committee that will decide if incidents rise to the level of discrimination or bias.

President Martin said that other issues are of great concern to students. They want the faculty to be better educated about issues surrounding gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity to a degree that they won't comment on a student's hair, for example, and won't call on a Black student to explain "the Black experience." They want the college's curriculum to take into account a broader range of cultures and experiences. They want departments to reexamine their curriculums with the goal of broadening their scope. President Martin said that it is her hope to have the committee engage with these issues. After agreeing to finalize the proposal to amend the Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom at its meeting the next week, the committee noted its intention to discuss how best to share the proposed language with the faculty, in order to garner feedback, before bringing the amendment forward for a vote.

The members next discussed a draft charge for an ad hoc committee that might conduct a comprehensive examination of the ways in which the effectiveness of teaching is evaluated at the college, and make recommendations that could be brought to the faculty. Professor Manion said that it was her understanding, based on the committee's last conversation about such an ad hoc committee, that the charge would be narrower—focusing on issues surrounding bias in the evaluation of teaching. Professor Umphrey commented that, if a committee is charged to examine the ways in which teaching effectiveness is evaluated more broadly, the stated spring 2021 deadline for the completion of the ad hoc committee's work is not realistic. Professor del Moral, who said that she likes the charge that was shared and favors the broad mandate, concurred that the ad hoc committee would need more time to address this matter. Professor Kingston noted that faculty are already overburdened, and that modes of teaching are in flux at this time, which would currently make it difficult to have a deep discussion of this very important and complex topic. He commented that, in developing the common teaching evaluation form, the committee that he had chaired had examined issues surrounding bias in the evaluation of teaching. It would be beneficial for the form to be used until sufficient experience has accumulated to see if any issues emerge, he suggested. Professor Trapani expressed support for charging an ad hoc committee to review the evaluation of teaching more holistically. Student reports of their experiences in the classroom are just one measure of teaching effectiveness; the student retrospective letters, faculty classroom visits, and other forms of evaluation are also important and should be considered, he noted. At the conclusion of the discussion, it was agreed that the members would return to this topic this spring and decide the timing regarding charging an ad hoc committee to conduct a comprehensive examination of the ways in which teaching effectiveness is evaluated.

The meeting ended with the members expressing gratitude to Norm Jones, chief equity and inclusion officer, for [three informative memos about the work of his office](#) that he had sent to the committee, in response to questions raised during previous Committee of Six conversations. Professor Trapani commented that he would be most interested to learn more, from an organizational point of view, about the ways in which offices and centers fit together to conduct this important work.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty