

The seventh 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 25, 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. Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Manion next asked when the committee would discuss [a note from Professor Grobe that she had shared with the committee](#). 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).

Provost Epstein, who commented that removing or shifting the location of this language would require a vote of the board of trustees, reminded the members that this topic will be on the committee’s agenda for the meeting of November 8. President Martin informed the committee 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. She finds the placement of the language in the tenure-criteria section of the handbook to be unusual, however. Some members agreed that the language is very problematic and said that it is their hope that it can be removed.

Continuing with questions, Professor Clotfelter asked for an updated response from the provost’s office to the letter sent by untenured STEM faculty in March, 2021. He particularly highlighted the need for tenure-track faculty to be adequately supported in the pre- and post-award stages of the grants process. Provost Epstein said that she would provide another update soon.

Professor Clotfelter next inquired about the status of appointing colleagues to serve on the Consultative Group for Tenure-Track Faculty. The provost said she had sent a note to tenure-track faculty to ask for volunteers to serve and that she was very pleased that Professors Bernard, Leydon-Hardy, and Riondato responded that they wish to do so. It would be helpful to have another colleague from the humanities or social sciences join the group to round out the membership, Provost Epstein added.

The members next reviewed a final iteration of the committee’s draft template for departmental expectations for tenure. The members approved the template and agreed that the provost should share the document at the November meeting of the chairs of academic departments and programs. Once departments complete their documents using the template, the Committee of Six will be asked to review them and to offer feedback, as needed, Provost Epstein noted. At the committee’s request, the provost agreed to provide a memo to the chairs to frame the conversation about the template for the chairs.

Discussion turned briefly to [a note from the Faculty Housing Committee](#), in which the committee responded to the Committee of Six’s feedback regarding the proposed house purchase program. The provost explained that she and the president agree that length of ownership of a college house beyond the owner’s retirement should not extend to the end of life, as proposed, but should instead be limited to five to seven years post retirement. They thanked those who have encouraged further thinking about this idea, including the Committee of Six. Provost Epstein noted that staff in Facilities have agreed to oversee a

feasibility study for creating more rental units in the large houses that don't sell, as well as for the development of additional housing units that could be put up for sale. Professor Martini expressed hope that the larger unoccupied college houses might not be offered for sale, but instead be used for these purposes from the outset; Professor Schroeder Rodríguez suggested that providing housing to support international faculty exchanges would be desirable as well. Responding to Professor Umphrey's question about next steps, Provost Epstein said that she and President Martin now have a better sense of the views of the community about housing needs and will explore opportunities and make decisions accordingly.

The members next considered [an email that Professor Frank had sent](#) about the possibility of turning on the chat function during faculty meetings, with the goal of providing a tool for enhancing engagement among faculty members during this time of virtual meetings. While the committee saw some benefits to trying this approach, and there was some support for the idea, perhaps as a trial, it was agreed that the president should not be put in the position of both chairing the meeting and moderating the chat. The possibility of side conversations in the chat becoming a distraction from the business of the faculty meeting was raised as a concern, as was the potential for circulating misinformation via the chat. The committee also discussed the idea of having a Slack channel for faculty to use during faculty meetings, and it was noted that there are already several cohort-specific Slack channels, including one for untenured STEM faculty that is active during faculty meetings. Some members expressed reservations about using the chat function, and the committee wondered what problem would be solved by doing so. The members agreed that many faculty members seem to be feeling the loss of community that has resulted from the pandemic, with faculty meetings taking place on Zoom and other opportunities to engage in person with colleagues diminished. Provost Epstein noted that there are challenges to having in-person faculty meetings at this time, as Cole Assembly Room would be too crowded and doesn't have the necessary ventilation. She said that she has found that many colleagues have enjoyed the in-person *On Amherst Plate* conversations that she has hosted, as well as the program for new chairs that is under way in person. The provost offered to create a social gathering for faculty this semester, and the president said that she is considering possible venues for a holiday party, with the ability to have such an event dependent on the course of the pandemic. The committee expressed enthusiasm for having more in-person events for faculty and asked the provost to proceed with plans for a gathering this semester.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to personnel matters.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty