

The tenth 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 5, 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 the members discussing two letters that they had received from faculty members ([one from Professors Douglas, George, and Shah](#), [another from Professor Kunichika](#)). In their communications, these colleagues had raised concerns about the committee's approach to facilitating the faculty's consideration of a possible amendment to the [Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#). The committee discussed the letter-writers' questioning of its decision not to hold meetings with small groups of faculty prior to having a committee-of-the-whole discussion at a faculty meeting. Professor Kingston said that he sees trade-offs associated with both approaches. Having discussions with small groups could enable the committee to receive feedback that could be helpful in shaping the proposed language, in advance of bringing it forward to the full faculty. On the other hand, holding discussions with a subset of the faculty initially would privilege certain voices, in his view. Noting that the committee envisions its proposed language as a starting point for open and inclusive conversation by the faculty about this important issue, Professor Kingston said that he continues to favor having a committee-of-the-whole discussion as a first step. The other members agreed, noting that they will consider the next steps in the process, based on the conversation at the faculty meeting. The committee concurred that it is important to remain mindful that the Black Student Union and many Black alumni have requested that the faculty consider an amendment to the statement, and to remember that consideration of this issue is just one part of a [larger anti-racism effort](#) that the college is undertaking.

Turning to a related issue, Professor Manion proposed that the committee reexamine asking attendees to keep their Zoom video feeds on throughout faculty meetings that are being conducted via Zoom. She finds it intrusive that everyone has been asked to do so, given the large size of the meeting. Instead, perhaps, faculty could turn their video feeds on once they have been recognized to speak, she suggested. This approach would also draw more attention to the speaker, reducing visual distractions in Professor Manion's view. Professor Umphrey requested that the members have a broader conversation about facilitating faculty meetings using Zoom, with an eye toward finding ways to improve the experience, if possible. She commented on the loss of human connection and other challenges associated with this modality, which have an impact on the quality of discussion. At the same time, there are many important issues to discuss, and she recognizes that there is no alternative to Zoom. The members agreed to discuss this topic at a future meeting, and that it would be helpful to consult with colleagues in IT about options. Commenting on another issue related to the faculty meeting, Professor Trapani asked that the chair seek to recognize colleagues who haven't yet spoken, before turning to those who have already expressed their views. In this way, discussion can be informed by the fullest range of views. President Martin and Provost Epstein, who serves as the chair of committee-of-the-whole conversations, agreed that this is a good approach.

Noting with great sadness the death of Sigrit Schütz, Senior Lecturer of German, Emerita, on September 19, 2020, the provost next proposed colleagues who could be invited to serve on a memorial minute committee.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Umphrey said that some students have asked her about the college's plans for bringing students to campus for the spring 2021 semester, and she inquired what the current thinking is on this front. Provost Epstein responded that, while no plans have been finalized, it is still hoped that juniors and seniors will be invited to campus, as will students whose home circumstances impede their academic progress. In this way members of all classes would have had the opportunity to be on campus for a semester this year. The intention is to make an announcement in early November. President Martin and Provost Epstein commented that all plans are subject to change, depending on the course of the pandemic.

Continuing with questions, Professor Kingston said that it has come to his attention that some tenure-track faculty members who were promised Gregory S. Call interns in their appointment letters did not receive the promised number of interns last summer, and that this has affected their ability to conduct their research. He asked why the decision was made, how many tenure-track faculty members were affected, and if there are plans to provide the interns. Provost Epstein said that, in this case, budgetary concerns led to a decision that, in an effort to provide all faculty with at least one intern, most faculty would not be awarded multiple interns this summer. The provost said that she would look into this matter further to identify the tenure-track colleagues who have been affected, and to meet their needs. Professor Kingston expressed the view that tenure-track faculty should be prioritized in the intern allocation process, perhaps starting in January. Provost Epstein said that this would mean that some tenured faculty will not have any interns. Professor Kingston said that, under the circumstances, this seems like the best approach. The provost said that the college is continuing to honor the contracts of all faculty, and that any colleagues with questions about their individual circumstances should contact her.

Professor Trapani next expressed gratitude to President Martin and to Michael Roth, president of Wesleyan University, for co-writing [a statement](#) expressing outrage over the Department of Education's civil rights investigation of Princeton University, surrounding racism and adherence to federal non-discrimination law. He noted that a number of other college presidents were signatories to the statement. President Martin thanked Professor Trapani for his support.

Turning to another topic, President Martin informed the committee that she has heard from the members of the student advisory group on COVID-19 with which she meets regularly, and from some faculty members, about the challenge of not having a fall break this semester. She asked the members for their thoughts about the possibility of having the equivalent of a mountain day, as a means of providing some fun and pleasure during this very difficult time. The idea would be to call off classes on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday in October, as a surprise. Students could spend time outdoors at the farm or on the other side of the bike path, for example, or even catch up on sleep, if they prefer. The college might organize some activities, but it would be a fairly unstructured day, the president said. Faculty would have the option of making up missed classes on November 30, which is the first day of the reading period. There are no make-up days scheduled in the fall, and the reading period is longer than usual this year, the provost noted. For this reason, it seems permissible to have a single make-up day during the reading period, during this highly unusual semester, she noted. The members agreed. This will be particularly important for those who are teaching seminars that meet once a week, in her view. The members expressed enthusiasm for the idea of having a mountain day, as it was felt that both students and faculty would benefit from some relief from the pressures of the current circumstances. Professor del Moral, who said she supports the proposal, also noted that some faculty members might not benefit if they do not teach on the day of the week on which mountain day will ultimately be held. Perhaps mountain "day" could extend over two days, she suggested. Professor Leise said that she supports taking off one day of class but would not want to miss two. Professor Trapani commented that it might be a bit challenging for STEM faculty to make up multiple sections and/or labs that would be missed, but he feels that colleagues could work around this situation—much as they do when there is a snow day. He expressed enthusiasm for having a mountain day. President Martin thanked the members for this feedback.

The committee turned next to [a proposal for an education studies major](#), which had been forwarded by the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), along with [a cover note from Professor Melillo, chair of the CEP](#). The committee noted that the proposal has been in development since 2014, that there has long been great interest in this field at Amherst, and that the proposal has been refined over time to address questions that have been raised. The committee also commented that the CEP, according to Professor Melillo, now unanimously supports the proposal. The members agreed with the CEP that the proposal is very compelling and well developed. Provost Epstein, while expressing support for the proposal, also raised the broader issue of the fracturing of Amherst's curriculum—as the trend toward

adding new majors and programs continues, while the number of students at the college has not grown for some time. The impact can already be seen on majors that attract a small number of students and have difficulty mounting upper-level courses, the provost said. At present, the college has three or four large majors, while many other departments have smaller ones. Professor Kingston, who prefaced his comments by noting that the proposal seems excellent, agreed with the provost that regularly adding new majors will dilute the curriculum at some point. He expressed the view that it is important for students to have a cohort in which to engage with a major together. Splintering the curriculum excessively may ultimately entail costs both for students and in terms of additional layers of bureaucracy, he noted. In addition, with a fixed number of faculty positions spread across an ever-growing number of departments/majors, expansion of one program must ultimately come at a cost elsewhere.

Professor Leise expressed enthusiasm for the proposal. She said that she is particularly excited that the education studies major would present opportunities for faculty from a diverse set of fields to come together to participate in an interdisciplinary effort, pulling together different parts of the college community. At present, many students can be isolated in one discipline as they focus on a major; this major would encourage students to explore the curriculum. Professor Manion, who described the proposal as “phenomenal,” wondered whether education studies, as presented, should actually become a major. She noted the lack of a structured curriculum and guidance as to how students should navigate the open curriculum are existing weaknesses that this proposal seems to address. She wonders what the proposed major would achieve that a major in American studies does not already provide. Rather than a major, this proposal seems to describe more of a pathway through the curriculum. Professor Manion wonders if this seemingly pre-professional track would be a good thing for Amherst students and the college generally. Provost Epstein said the focus of the education studies major would not be on career preparation, but rather on studying a part of society.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Umphrey commented that she sees similarities between the proposed major in education studies, and the major in law, jurisprudence, and social thought (LJST)—which is not designed to prepare students for a career in law. In fact, many LJST majors pursue careers in education, she noted. Professor Umphrey said that she finds the proposal to be thoughtful, and the idea of a liberal arts approach to the professions to be compelling. She does have some concern about enrollment draws, anticipating that the major would be very popular among students. With only eight required courses for the major, students may choose it as part of a double major, however. Professor Umphrey wonders how important having a tenure line devoted to education studies would be, and if the college would be making a commitment to having such an FTE if the major is established. There are already a number of faculty members who are focusing on education, as revealed within the proposal, she noted. Provost Epstein expressed the view that it would be important to have a faculty member who would anchor the major. Since the CEP is supporting the establishment of the major, she feels that an FTE in education studies would be allocated eventually. She also noted that there is likely a donor who would fund the line. Since there would not be an associated department and FTEs are not allocated to programs, the FTE would need to reside in a department—for example, American Studies, Economics, or History, Provost Epstein said. The individual’s primary activity would be education studies, however.

Professor Trapani said that he also finds the proposed major to be compelling, in particular because it would bring together faculty from a number of departments. At the same time, he expressed some worry about issues surrounding community and coherence. He expressed the view that, since there is only one required (introductory) course being proposed for the major, students might find it difficult to form a community with their fellow education studies majors; they would attend classes for the major across the curriculum, and essentially would be tailoring their own education. By comparison, environmental studies, both when it was a program and now as a department, has a core course and an upper-level seminar that majors enroll in as a cohort. Provost Epstein responded that, as noted in the proposal, there is a very strong career community within the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and

Planning that centers around education and is led by Robert Siudzinski, program director of the Careers in Education Professions Program. Students who are interested in education form a strong cohort through their interactions in this venue. Provost Epstein commented that the focus on career in this context is situated within the Loeb Center, which is appropriate.

Continuing, Provost Epstein noted that, after some time, it is possible that the faculty who are involved in the major may decide that they want more structure in regard to the curriculum. It is also possible that, if there is a major, students may no longer coalesce as a community within the Loeb Center. Professor del Moral commented that Latinx and Latin American studies majors navigate their own curricular pathways to meet major requirements, and that this approach has been working well. She does not see a need for more structure. She feels that it is important to support this student-driven proposal, which is a reflection of their own academic interests. In many ways, the college is responding to the changing demographics of the student population, and that can include a recognition of shifting academic interests. The faculty should move the major forward, in her view.

Returning to a comment made by the provost, Professor Umphrey said that, as a general matter, she wonders about the idea of a donor funding a faculty line and generating the foundation of curricular innovation. She asked for clarification on this point, at the same time expressing confidence in the integrity of Amherst's processes, and noting the energy of faculty and students surrounding this particular proposal. Provost Epstein commented that the college would not accept funding for a faculty position that is focused on a particular field, unless a department had an intellectual interest in the field and desired to have an FTE, and the CEP had recommended the allocation of the position. President Martin commented that Amherst regularly accepts donations, including for the endowment of faculty lines, that allow the college to move forward with initiatives in new areas, and/or to meet the college priorities. In regard to faculty hiring, the college has declined and should decline gifts for an FTE that would require that the occupant hold particular political views. This is an ethical line that would not be crossed, President Martin said. Professor Umphrey thanked President Martin and Provost Epstein for this clarification. The members then expressed support for the education studies proposal and agreed to forward it to the faculty for a vote at the next faculty meeting after the October 5 meeting.

The committee turned next to three other proposals forwarded by the CEP—developed in consultation with the class deans—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 \(shown in red\) to the readmission policy](#); and [changes \(shown in red\) to the course requirements section of the Amherst College Catalog](#). The Committee of Six's discussion was informed by [a letter from Professor Melillo](#) and a review of [relevant CEP minutes](#).

The committee was generally in favor of the proposed revisions, which will require a vote of the faculty to implement. A number of questions were raised about the pass-fail proposal, including the timing of the declaration deadline and whether there should be a separate declaration deadline for seniors (so that the deadline could be later for all other students), as well as the practicality of requiring students to obtain permission from their advisors to declare a course pass-fail. After some conversation, the committee decided that the proposal should go forward, rather than being returned to the CEP for revision, given that the faculty would vet the proposal during a faculty meeting.

The committee's other questions centered on the proposed revisions to the course requirements section of the catalog. Professor Trapani said that he finds it contradictory that Amherst prefers that students make up failed courses at other institutions, rather than at the college, while also not accepting credit for courses taken at other institutions under most other circumstances. Referring to catalog language that the CEP is proposing to strike (see below), he also asked if students would be able to combine half courses at Amherst (potentially serving as a fifth course in a given semester) to make up a limited number of deficiencies. Specifically, these would be courses that are not required for the major, but which could be counted as course credits toward graduation. Professor Trapani also expressed equity concerns if this practice is allowed; he wonders if such half courses are spread across the

curriculum to a degree that all students would have access to this option—or whether some students would be advantaged.

In exceptional cases a student may, with the permission of both the student's academic advisor and class dean, take five full courses for credit during a given semester. Such permission is normally granted only to students of demonstrated superior academic ability, responsibility, and will. Fifth courses cannot be used to accelerate graduation. ~~On occasion, a student who has failed a course may be permitted to take a fifth course in a given semester if, in the judgment of the Committee on Academic Standing, this additional work can be undertaken without jeopardizing the successful completion of all courses taken in that semester. Students may only retake a course for which they have received a failing grade or from which they have withdrawn in a prior semester.~~

Provost Epstein said that she would ask the CEP for clarification about these issues and report back to the members. The members supported the CEP's recommendation to revise the policy on readmission to the college after a voluntary withdrawal.

The meeting ended with a brief discussion of possible ways to honor the accomplishments of faculty members, a topic that arose during an earlier conversation of the results of the COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) survey, and which last year's Committee of Six had recommended be discussed this year. Professor Trapani said that he would like to see colleagues recognized and rewarded for contributions that necessitate carrying a workload that is heavier than the norm, particularly in the realm of college service. He sees this as separate from the idea of public celebrations for scholarly achievements, he noted. Provost Epstein asked what form this acknowledgement and reward might take. Professor Trapani said that he envisions a system that would be flexible and that would offer different options. For example, a colleague who chairs a number of burdensome committees, serves as a liaison to an athletic team, and organizes a lecture series might be rewarded with a course release or a similar time-based reward. Someone who takes on numerous honors students every summer for five years might be rewarded with summer salary. He noted that many tenure-track faculty members have expressed to him that they do not feel recognized for work that they do that goes beyond what is expected. He shared the sentiment that the college communicates what it values by what it incentivizes and rewards. President Martin commented that Amherst does not have a celebratory culture, which she has long thought is unfortunate. At present, it is difficult for her and the provost to know all that faculty members are doing in the realms of service to the college and the profession. In her experience, the idea of faculty annual reports has been resisted at the college. Having this documentation from each professor would be a useful tool when considering forms of recognition, she noted, providing information, which would otherwise be invisible, about professors' service to the college and the profession, as well as accomplishments in the realms of teaching and scholarship. Professors del Moral and Manion suggested that the members revisit this idea. Professor Umphrey commented that there is a longstanding ethos of equality at the college that informs many processes, as well as an expectation of just doing the necessary work without recognition. While there are positives about such a system, it also obscures inequitable workloads. With little time remaining, the members agreed to return to this conversation at a future meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty