

The first meeting of the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) for the academic year 2022–2023 was called to order by Professor Call, chair of the committee, in the president’s office at 4:00 P.M., on Monday, September 12, 2022. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Coráñez Bolton, Martini, Mattiacci, and Polk; President Elliott; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with introductions and warm words of welcome. President Elliott noted that he looks forward to working with the committee, which he understands is a new governance body at the college (during the last academic year, the faculty voted to divide the Committee of Six into two separate committees—the FEC and the Tenure and Promotion Committee). On behalf of the faculty members of the committee, Professor Call commented that shaping the ways in which the FEC will evolve will be an exciting collaborative endeavor during the FEC’s inaugural year, which coincides with the first year of President Elliott’s presidency. It is his hope that the committee will be helpful to the president and benefit the college in myriad ways.

Under “Topics of the day,” President Elliott, responding to the committee’s request, provided an update on the search for the college’s next chief financial and administrative officer (CFAO). As he had conveyed in [an email sent in August to faculty and staff](#), the president shared that he has relaunched a national search for the next CFAO. (The previous search failed when the finalist withdrew from consideration.) The president noted that he has reappointed the original search committee, on which he will now serve. (General Counsel and Chief Policy Officer Lisa Rutherford is chairing the search, and the other members of the committee are Dean of Admission and Financial Aid Matt McGann; Chief Investment Officer Letitia Johnson; and Samuel A. Hitchcock Professor of Mineralogy and Geology and Associate Provost and Associate Dean of the Faculty Jack Cheney.) President Elliott commented on the importance of the CFAO role at the college, the responsibilities of which have been expanded to include oversight of campus operations. He has been advised that adding this area to the others that already report to the CFAO will bring the position into alignment with the structure of this role at other schools, and help to attract the strongest candidates. The president also noted his decision to engage the executive search firm of Spencer Stuart to assist with this search, explaining that the firm has a record of success in conducting CFAO searches, including recent recruitment efforts for similar positions at some of Amherst’s peer institutions. Professor Call expressed support for adjusting the structure of the CFAO position to conform to the current standards of the profession, noting that he has seen past efforts of this kind—including the restructuring of the position of dean of admission and financial aid at the college years ago—result in drawing highly qualified pools of candidates. The college will move as expeditiously as possible to fill this critical position with a stellar candidate, the president said. In the meantime, Interim Chief Financial Officer Tom Dwyer and Interim Chief of Campus Operations David Breen have agreed to continue in their interim roles, and President Elliott expressed appreciation for their willingness to do so. Professor Martini commented that the skill sets of the chief of campus operations and the CFAO seem different, noting that the college is currently engaging in a good number of building projects. President Elliott said that the campus operations function at the college boasts many talented and experienced colleagues who will work closely with the CFAO.

In response to the committee’s inquiry, the president next provided a brief update on the ways in which Amherst is addressing health risks surrounding the [monkeypox virus](#). Fortunately, thus far, cases of the virus have not emerged within the college community, he noted. Since there are serious health risks associated with the virus, the college has been monitoring the trajectory of monkeypox, including staying in contact with other Massachusetts schools; focusing on educating the college community; taking some precautionary measures to avoid an outbreak on campus; and preparing for the steps that would be taken should an outbreak occur ([See email that Provost Epstein and Kate Harrington, chief human resources officer, sent to faculty and staff on this subject in August.](#)) While the monkeypox virus appears to be less of a threat than COVID-19, the college is remaining vigilant. Of particular concern is the longer isolation period

that would be required for infected students, which would make it challenging to keep them on campus, and to offer the level of academic support that would be necessary, the president noted.

Turning to the topic of the faculty town hall and reception he will host on September 20, President Elliott said that he is looking forward to the event. It will provide an opportunity for him to get to know faculty colleagues, share some of his early impressions, and answer questions. He asked the members for their thoughts about potential topics of interest to the faculty that he might discuss, and the committee offered some suggestions that included long-range planning for campus facilities, progress on the climate action plan and the impact of related construction that is set to take place in summer 2023, and current college COVID protocols ([see the email that was sent to faculty, staff, and students on September 8 about COVID protocols that would take effect on September 12](#)). The members agreed that it would be helpful to have administrators give presentations at faculty meetings on some of these topics, as well as others, this fall. The committee also decided to invite Matt McGann, dean of admission and financial aid, to meet with the FEC in October to share information about the impact of likely upcoming Supreme Court decisions, and to answer questions about admissions at the college more broadly; having Dean McGann give a presentation at a faculty meeting would also be welcome, the members noted. A presentation on the budget and the performance of the endowment at a faculty meeting should also be planned soon, it was agreed. Professor Martini commented that, given the centrality and importance of sustainability in regard to the college's mission and goals—intersecting with everything that the committee will be thinking about—it would be informative for Director of Sustainability Wes Dripps to give a presentation to the FEC and at a faculty meeting as well. The other members concurred that having W. Dripps speak at a faculty meeting would be informative.

Provost Epstein next welcomed the members and reviewed some of the ways in which the FEC will work. She noted issues of confidentiality and attribution in the committee's minutes, informing the members that the public minutes should be used as a guide in regard to questions of whether matters that are discussed can be shared with others. Associate Provost Tobin informed the members that, in her experience, very few conversations (with the exception of personnel matters and committee nominations that are under consideration) were not included in the Committee of Six's public minutes. She explained that minutes of discussions of certain sensitive or unresolved matters and plans in their formative stages, about which the president and the provost were seeking the advice of the Committee of Six, were also sometimes kept confidential. Generally, conversations about these issues were made public once the matter was in a less tentative state. It is anticipated that the FEC will adopt these practices, the provost noted.

Continuing the conversation about the committee's work, it was agreed that email will not be used to communicate about personnel or other confidential matters, and that the use of email to address FEC deliberations should be kept to a minimum as a general matter. Provost Epstein reviewed the long-standing policy of appending letters to the Committee of Six's minutes when the members discussed the matters contained within them. Letter-writers were informed by the provost's office as to when their letters would be appended. If colleagues stated at the outset that they did not want the contents of a letter discussed in the public minutes, the committee would decide whether it wished to take up the matter in question. Again, it is anticipated that the FEC will adopt these practices. The members decided that, for reasons of transparency, comments by FEC members will be attributed by name in the minutes. Provost Epstein noted that the committee's regular meeting time will be 4:00 P.M. on specific Mondays this fall. The provost informed the committee that Associate Provost Tobin will continue to serve as the recorder of the FEC minutes, and that Nancy Ratner, director of academic projects, will continue to serve as the recorder of the faculty meeting minutes.

Discussion turned to the schedule for faculty meetings this fall, and the members decided that the following dates should be held for possible faculty meetings: October 18, November 1, November 15, December 6, and December 20. The members agreed to try to avoid having a faculty meeting on December 20, unless absolutely necessary.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Mattiacci, referencing [a note on the subject that Professor Fong sent to the committee in August](#), asked if the tents that have been provided for classes and social activities are adequate at this time. Provost Epstein responded that sixteen faculty members have reserved tents for classes. It is her impression that the tents, which are very expensive to rent, are being used both for classes and other activities, and that demand is being met via the number of tents that are now in place.

The members then reviewed proposals for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Stipend competition and selected nominees.

The committee next discussed potential FEC agenda items for this year. It was agreed that major issues for discussion will include the format and meeting time for faculty meetings and—with support from consultant Susan Pierce—ways to streamline the college’s committee structure and related governance questions. Other topics will include a proposal by the provost to revise the compensation program for chairs; proposals for standardizing mentoring programs within departments, aspects of processes related to joint appointments, and protocols when there are internal candidates in faculty searches; a review of data surrounding the growth of the college and other trends over recent decades; the Latin honors proposal that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) is expected to bring forward; the process used to select the annual recipient of the Jeffrey B. Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize; the process for soliciting teaching evaluations for tenured faculty members (the current system of automatic solicitation of student teaching evaluations from tenured faculty has generated poor response rates, and it won’t be possible to use it in Workday); a review of the common teaching evaluation form, since the end of the pilot period for it is drawing to a close; an update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the 2016 report on the Place of Athletics at Amherst (the “Diver II report”); and the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Enhancement of the Procedures and Practices Used for the Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness, which are expected this fall. In terms of the possibility of considering a January term pilot in 2023—a question raised by the committee—the provost said that she is not sure that the CEP plans to consider this issue. If there is a pilot, it would be modest and would not include courses that would be given for credit, she said.

The committee also asked that the administration provide updates on the college’s anti-racism efforts and the Meiklejohn Fellows Program. Professor Call then noted the committee’s regular responsibilities, in accordance with the FEC’s charge.

Some of these and other topics were then discussed briefly. The committee agreed to charge the Housing Committee with making recommendations for updating the subsidies for the rental housing and house purchase programs. Professor Call noted that the hope is that a proposal will be brought forward this fall so that the administration can consider it, and agree that it can be adopted before the next housing cycle this spring. Professor Polk asked if there are specific numbers that the Housing Committee has in mind based on its discussions about this issue last year. Professor Call, who chaired the Housing Committee last year, responded that the committee will try to calibrate its proposal based on the current market. He imagines that the Housing Committee will likely propose proportional increases in the subsidies and noted the current inflationary environment. Professor Martini also expressed interest in having the college study issues surrounding environmental sustainability in relation to the housing program and, potentially, ways to rethink traditional approaches to residences. From a sustainability perspective, she expressed concern that five large college houses were sold recently (one other sale is pending) to individuals, rather than dividing the homes into multiple units that could either be rented or sold. Professor Martini said that she was also disappointed to learn that the number of available college rental units could not accommodate all colleagues this fall. She noted that, last fall, the Committee of Six was assured that the rental program was meeting all prospective needs. This was a reason given for not wishing to create more rental units by carving out spaces within the larger houses for this purpose, as it was proposed that the houses might have to be rented to tenants outside of the

Amherst College community. Provost Epstein responded that this was a particularly challenging year for meeting the need for rental units, particularly because of the competitive home and rental market in the community, a result of the pandemic and escalating prices. She is aware that some individuals will be vacating their rental units and hopes that those who could not avail themselves of college housing this year will be able to return to the program next year, with a higher standing on the priority list.

Conversation turned briefly to the college's COVID protocols. Professor Martini said that some students are concerned that students infected with COVID-19 will now isolate in their rooms, which means that a healthy student could be put in close contact with an infected one. President Elliott noted that, given how highly transmissible the omicron variant is, by the time students test positive, they have likely already exposed their close contacts to the virus. He commented that COVID-19 does not pose the same health risks for most people now as it did early in the pandemic, because COVID-19 is now endemic; the vast majority of students, faculty, and staff are vaccinated and boosted; and treatment options are available. Still, the college continues to offer a voluntary testing program with both PCR and antigen tests, has extended masking requirements, and continues to monitor the pandemic closely, the president noted. Professor Polk asked if the college still has isolation space. The president responded that Amherst is renting some dorm rooms at Hampshire College for this purpose and will continue to do so at least through the end of this semester. He explained that Amherst is prepared to move to a different set of policies if the pandemic situation changes dramatically. (Prior to the meeting, Professor Rosenbaum had sent [a letter about the college's COVID policies](#) to the committee; the members agreed that it should be attached to the minutes. It was also forwarded to the Health Readiness Group.)

Professor Mattiacci next asked about the committee's role in considering policies and drafting legislation, commenting, as an example, that the FEC had not played a role in decision-making about COVID protocols. The provost noted that the committee drafts legislation to bring forward for inclusion in the *Faculty Handbook* and plays a leadership role in matters related to the academic mission. The administration makes decisions about other matters, often consulting with the committee and other bodies, and is always interested in the community's feedback. At times, if there is significant community concern about a policy that the administration has implemented, it may be reconsidered, Provost Epstein said.

In response to the committee's question about the provost's thinking about possible changes to the compensation program for the chairs of academic departments and programs, Provost Epstein noted that, over the five-year period in which the program has been in place, it has become apparent that departmental size and complexity has a significant impact on the demands being placed on some chairs. In addition, some programs have a larger number of majors than others, which can also create inequities in regard to chairing; all programs have minimal responsibilities when it comes to faculty personnel processes, she noted. Given these disparities, the provost thinks a differentiated compensation approach should be adopted. Under this model, compensation for chairs of larger and more complex departments, as well as for programs, would be increased.

Provost Epstein next discussed possible ways of moving forward with the process for considering possible ways to streamline the committee structure. Prior to the meeting, the members were provided with background material about this effort, which was under way in 2021–2022, and which had led to the faculty's decision to divide the Committee of Six into two committees. Last year's Committee of Six decided that one of the major projects that the FEC should undertake this year should be continuing with this work and developing a proposal for change, with the support of consultant Susan Pierce. Provost Epstein noted that S. Pierce has spoken with many faculty members about the current committee structure, and that associate professors, in particular, expressed concern over the burden that committee service places on them. The members asked the provost to invite S. Pierce to an upcoming FEC meeting. Later, each member could speak with the consultant individually, sharing more

about their thoughts about this issue, the committee suggested. The provost agreed to invite S. Pierce. She noted that President Elliott and she would also be speaking with S. Pierce.

Turning to the topic of the data that the committee has requested from the Office of Institutional Research, Professor Call explained that a review of this information should provide a helpful historical context and shared understanding of important trends at the college over the past three decades. This will serve as a useful foundation as the FEC undertakes its work. In regard to the Diver II report, Professor Martini said that she is interested in reviewing data about the demographic makeup of Amherst's athletic teams and how it may have changed since 2016, when the recommendations in the report were brought forward.

The members next had a preliminary discussion about the format of faculty meetings and the related issue of finding an alternative meeting time, which led to a conversation about the possibility of making changes to the teaching schedule. Prior to the meeting, the members were provided with background material about efforts undertaken at the college over the years to develop a proposal to shift the time of faculty meetings away from the evening. None of these has been successful, most notably because of a lack of confidence that faculty will adjust their teaching schedules to accommodate a time for faculty meetings during the day—which has been a goal for some time. The members discussed [the request that there be a remote option for attending faculty meetings, which was sent to the committee in August by Professor Fong](#). Prior to the meeting, the provost also shared with the members the results of an informal survey she had done of her counterparts at some peer schools about whether their institutions have been having hybrid faculty meetings—and, if so, what that experience has been like. Provost Epstein summarized the results by noting that most deans who were surveyed reported holding or having held faculty meetings in a hybrid format. In general, most feel that the hybrid format is not very satisfying. While there can be an increase in official attendance, some reported, the provost said that many deans expressed concerns about the quality of participation. Polling systems varied widely, she said. Among those systems mentioned were Poll Everywhere; using clickers (or simply hands) for those present and the Zoom polling function for those on Zoom; a Google form system; Qualtrics; and iClicker Cloud.

While the committee expressed a preference for in-person meetings and noted the limitations of a hybrid format, most also felt that it would be desirable to have a remote option to ensure that everyone who is eligible to participate can do so. Ideas that were discussed ranged from providing an option that would allow faculty to watch meetings via livestream, but not to speak at the meeting; to providing a livestream option and allowing faculty to ask questions via the chat function; to allowing watching, speaking, and voting to take place both remotely and in person. The provost and president expressed a preference, if possible, for finding a time for faculty meetings in the middle of the day that would not interfere with classes, and having the expectation be that individuals would attend in person. When asked for his views, President Elliott said that the current situation presents a conundrum. He has attended faculty meetings held in a hybrid format and has found them unwieldy; having robust engagement is challenging in this format, he feels. At the same time, he expressed astonishment that faculty meetings are still held in the evening at the college. Requiring attendance at that time seems problematic, in his view. Professor Coráñez Bolton wondered if it might be helpful to survey the faculty again about the issue of hybrid faculty meetings to see if views on this issue have changed since the last survey. Provost Epstein noted that it would be up to the CEP to develop a proposal to revise the academic schedule to permit faculty meetings to take place during the day. Options include developing new time slots during the day for teaching, as well as considering the possibility of teaching classes in the evening, with the goal of freeing up a lunchtime slot for faculty meetings, perhaps. The members agreed to continue their discussion of this issue after meeting with David Hamilton, chief information officer, who has agreed to outline remote options for faculty meetings and to give estimates of the resources that would be needed to implement them.

Concluding the meeting, Professor Mattiacci wondered about the mechanism by which faculty members who have concerns about Workday can convey them. She noted that some colleagues had expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the platform at the faculty meeting at the end of last year. Professor Martini said that her experience with advising using Workday during registration for first-year students went very well, and she praised the support that the registrar's office provided in real time. Professor Coráñez Bolton commented that he had also had a positive experience using the platform. It was noted that, while the system allowed students to select another course without permission, after having received approval from their advisor for a slate of up to eight courses last spring, many students have been consulting with their advisor anyway, it appears. Professor Polk said that his experience with Workday has been pretty good, though he has had trouble approving the registration of returning students who had not already created a saved schedule, and this step must be taken in order to approve a student's courses. Provost Epstein said that it is her understanding that registration with Workday went very smoothly with first-year students. There were some issues with returning students, who were used to the old system. She believes that faculty who want to offer feedback should reach out to the Faculty Computer Committee and/or may also contact Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services.

The meeting adjourned at 5:34 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty