

The nineteenth 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 on Monday, May 1, at 4:00 p.m. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Hasan, Martini, Mattiacci, and Polk; President Elliott; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Elliott informed the members that four finalists for the position of chief equity and inclusion officer (CEIO) will be coming to campus. Three candidates will be here the week of May 8, and the fourth will come to Amherst on May 15, he said. The president shared that open meetings will be scheduled for faculty and staff to ask questions, and he emphasized that the community’s feedback will be a very valuable part of the search process. The hope is to have the college’s new CEIO in place by this fall.

Continuing with his remarks, the president commented that, during this presidential transition year, a good number of members of the senior staff have served in their roles as interim appointees. He is pleased that, with the appointment of the CEIO, the senior leadership team will be fully staffed. The president expressed appreciation to Professor Jaswal for serving as interim CEIO until a permanent appointment is made, and thanked her for her excellent work in this role. Professor Call asked if there will be a search for the position that was held for many years by Jim Brassord, who retired from the college as chief of campus operations in 2022. President Elliott responded that there will be a search for a campus operations position that will have a different title and portfolio of responsibilities and will not report to the president. As a result of restructuring, campus operations will report to Mike Thomas, chief financial and administrative officer. David Breen, who has been serving as interim chief of campus operations will continue to fulfill some responsibilities until the new position has been filled, the president said.

President Elliott next informed the committee that the college will discontinue providing to-go containers at Valentine. (To-go containers will continue to be available for students who require them through an existing meal plan exemption process.) This change, which has been discussed with the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR), is being made because of both sustainability concerns as well as budgetary considerations, the president said. He informed the members that there are indications in residence halls and elsewhere on campus that a great deal of the food—up to 40 percent or more that is taken in to-go containers from Val—is not eaten and is thrown away. This is a deeply troubling situation that the college must address, the president commented. This change will be announced soon, and an increase to the prices of meals at Val is also under consideration as part of the budget process, as inflation has affected food costs dramatically. Turning briefly to another change in policy, which was made recently, President Elliott noted that members of the community have not shared concerns with him about the college’s decision to move away from COVID-19 restrictions.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Mattiacci, who noted how much she has been enjoying conversation with faculty and staff colleagues over lunch in Lewis-Sebring of late, asked when the facility will close for the year. She also expressed appreciation for the excellent coffee that is available at Lewis-Sebring, as well as the comfortable seating in the area outside the dining room. Professor Call also commented on how valuable it is to be able to bump into colleagues at Lewis-Sebring. Provost Epstein responded that May 17 will be the last day before the facility’s summer closure. The conversation segued into a broader discussion about the social benefits of having a space for faculty and staff to have informal interactions over coffee and lunch, which some members feel provides a way of building community at the college. Provost Epstein noted that, even before the pandemic, use of Lewis-Sebring was declining. One hypothesis is that many colleagues in the science center began to eat at the science center cafe instead, and still do. At the same time, the provost said that she knows that a number of faculty members have been experiencing a real sense of loss, now that there is insufficient staffing to provide the same experience that was available at Lewis-Sebring before the pandemic. She discussed with the committee a proposal for a new club-style format for Lewis-

Sebring that could be launched next year, if there is sufficient interest. The idea would be to create a comfortable space for faculty and staff to relax and/or meet at points during the day—over coffee and a newspaper, for example—and to continue to have a venue for lunch and conversation. Due to continuing staffing issues, lunch would need to be brought in from Val or home, as is true now. During some teaching times, traffic could become very heavy, she noted, and pose challenges.

Most members supported the club-style idea and encouraged the provost to move forward with it, particularly given that relatively few resources might be required to do so. The provost said that she would continue to explore this and other possibilities. Professor Polk commented that he does not feel a sense of nostalgia for bygone days spent at Lewis-Sebring, expressing the view that this social space has long been a venue in which only some individuals have felt welcome and/or comfortable. He noted that the college looks very different now than it did two decades ago, when colleagues spent part of their days dining together and/or having informal meetings at Lewis-Sebring. He suggested that efforts to rebuild community should take these changes in demographics and lifestyle into account—and that it be recognized that some faculty members did not feel connected to the community even before the pandemic. The provost thanked the committee for the ideas that had been shared. On a related front, she asked for the members' thoughts about whether there might be interest in having drop-in lunches for faculty at the Center for Humanistic Inquiry (CHI) on May 18 and 19—noting that colleagues enjoyed these opportunities for social interaction earlier this year, but wondering if the timing would work at this point in the semester. Most members were enthusiastic about offering the lunches.

The members next began the selection process for the recipient of this year's Jeffrey B. Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize. They first discussed possible ways of improving the process—including some ideas that have been considered by the Committee of Six in the past (e.g., having nominees submit teaching dossiers)—and then agreed to choose a recipient at their next meeting.

The committee also had a brief discussion about a proposal from the College Council to replace the current honor code with a very brief statement that would serve as the code. While intrigued by this idea, the members felt that it would be helpful to learn more about why the College Council has proposed such a dramatic revision. The committee asked the provost to contact the chair of the College Council and to request clarification surrounding some details of the proposal. Some members also proposed that consideration be given to repurposing or eliminating the College Council, which has often been inactive in recent years, it was noted. The president and provost suggested that, before this step is taken, it would be helpful to allow Angie Tissi-Gassoway, chief student affairs officer and dean of students, more time to learn if the College Council can support the work of her division in effective ways, including by providing a venue in which faculty and staff can work together on issues of importance that touch on student life.

Turning to the related matter of the responses to a survey that the FEC had sent to chairs of faculty committees and some staff members who work closely with them, the members discussed some themes that had emerged from this feedback—including the sense that most committee chairs found their service to be valuable and rewarding by and large, and that there is a great deal of interest in finding ways to make the distribution of committee work more equitable. Professor Mattiacci suggested that it could be useful for committees to rethink the time commitment required for their work—could the committee be just as effective if meetings were held less frequently, for example? Training for committee chairs would also be valuable, she noted. The committee agreed that the survey results indicate that many committee chairs feel that the college's committee structure is working well. The provost noted that much of the focus of the faculty governance project has been on finding ways to streamline this structure; in this regard, dividing the Committee of Six into two separate committees and redistributing the workload represents a significant accomplishment, addressing a problem of longstanding. At the same time, the governance project has led the provost to believe that most of the service burdens being experienced by the faculty are actually at the department level, she said. It would

be helpful to place more emphasis on exploring this issue, she noted. Professor Call, who has long held this view, pointed out that there are structural problems within some departments that can lead to tremendous service burdens for some members. As an example, he noted that the ratio of tenured members to tenure-track members can change in dramatic ways as a result of retirements and bringing new faculty to the department. While there could be a period in which tenured members outnumber tenure-track colleagues by a significant margin, when that structure flips, a relatively small number of tenured members must assume a great deal of additional departmental service—from conducting faculty searches to mentoring to preparing reappointment and tenure cases. Professor Call also suggested that, next year, the FEC continue to focus on improving aspects of faculty meetings—considering issues such as the order of the agenda and issues relating to voting.

Conversation turned to the format and substance of the report the members would give about the FEC's work at the final faculty meeting of the year. Several members agreed to offer an oral report, rather than a written one, summarizing the committee's work this year and then entertaining questions from the floor.

Concluding the meeting, Provost Epstein noted that Pawan Dhingra, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty, had led a discussion at the April 28 chairs' meeting about "invisible service." At the outset of the conversation, he had shared a document—vetted by the faculty equity and inclusion officers—that he had created after speaking with some faculty of color and women faculty members, summarizing some of what they have said about their experiences with "invisible service." The provost shared plans for the chairs of departments and programs to engage in conversations this fall with departmental faculty, and especially with those from underrepresented groups about "invisible service." The goal of such conversations is to surface the work, recognize it, and consider ways of addressing burdens that colleagues share, if this is desired. Chairs will be asked to summarize what they learn in a report to the provost in the fall, she noted. Professor Mattiacci suggested that it could be helpful to involve the faculty equity and inclusion officers in these departmental discussions.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty