

The second 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, September 13, 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 several hours after President Martin sent [an email to the community](#) to announce that she would be stepping down from the position of president of the college at the end of this academic year. In turn, each member thanked President Martin for her extraordinary tenure as Amherst's president, praising her inspirational leadership—often in the face of unprecedented challenges in the world—and her accomplishments. The committee applauded the president's plans to return to the college to teach, following a sabbatic year. President Martin thanked the members for their kind words.

Discussion turned to the process that will be used to search for Amherst's next president, which was described in [an email to the community](#) sent by Andrew Nussbaum '85, chair of the board of trustees, shortly before the committee's meeting began. The president explained that the board will constitute a presidential search committee soon, but is still deciding on the exact make-up of this body. It is anticipated that the search committee will engage in conversation with the Amherst community for the remainder of this semester and will likely begin the stage of speaking with candidates in the spring. The goal will be to have a new president in place this summer, and a search firm will be hired to assist the search committee.

The provost discussed ways of structuring the ballot for the election of the faculty representatives to the search committee. She noted that a Committee of Six-style election, with some modifications, had been used to elect the faculty representatives to the most recent presidential search committee. The members agreed that, as was true during the last election, colleagues who are on leave this year should be asked whether they want to be included on the ballot and should not be included unless they indicate a desire to be; faculty who are serving in administrative roles should not be included; faculty in their first year at the college should not be included; and that current members of the Committee of Six, the College Council, and the Committee on Educational Policy should be included.

Turning to the president's request that Kate Salop, the college's chief strategy officer, attend faculty meetings as a guest, without vote, the members concurred.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Vaughan asked about the committee's practice when a colleague writes to one or more of the faculty members of the Committee of Six and does not share the correspondence with other members and/or President Martin, Provost Epstein, or Associate Provost Tobin. The provost said that it is helpful when members share such correspondence so that the matter can be placed on the committee's agenda, and questions can be researched ahead of time, if necessary. Members who receive questions are also welcome to share information during the committee's meetings under "Questions from Committee Members," without advance notification, if they prefer, the provost said.

Continuing with questions, Professor Manion asked Provost Epstein for more details about the status of the work of Susan Pierce, the consultant who was hired last year to help develop proposals surrounding committee service and shared governance. The provost noted that she and Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, have now almost completed a draft of the survey that will be used to gather feedback on questions that the consultant has raised. These questions were discussed with the committee last year. Provost Epstein said that she plans to share the draft of the survey with S. Pierce by the end of the week, and also will discuss moving forward with the consultant's work this semester. Professor Manion thanked the provost and said that she was pleased to learn of these plans.

Professor Manion next inquired whether the college will be adopting technology that will make logistics surrounding advising and supporting students more efficient. Provost Epstein responded that, while it had been envisioned that Workday Student would be the tool through which improvements would be made on this front, much to the disappointment and frustration of those who are working on this project, Workday's advising tool is proving to be inadequate to the task. The college has made its concerns known to the company, and if a solution cannot be found, it might become necessary to engage a third-party provider to

supply this function, and to link it to Workday. Provost Epstein explained that, due to this unfortunate set of circumstances, changes to the advising process will be delayed. At this point, it does not make sense to invest in modifications to ACData, she noted. Professor Umphrey reported that some staff members have shared with her that the implementation of Workday has created a significant amount of distress, and that the product seems not to provide the functionality that the company advertises.

Professor Clotfelter next asked the provost for an update on [her email from July regarding the staffing of the Grants Office](#), to ensure that faculty are adequately supported pre- and post-award. The provost responded that the Grants Office is in a period of transition, with one staff member retiring in December and another having left at the end of the summer to pursue other endeavors. In the near term, the office will take on many of the responsibilities around the pre-submission review. The provost noted that Darlene Sliwa, research administrator in the Office of the Controller, has returned to Amherst on a part-time basis to focus on post-award administration. Any questions about newly awarded or continuing grants should be directed to her. In addition, a consultant has been engaged to assess which resources are needed most in the Grants Office, including the level of staffing, the provost said. It is recognized, for example, that a colleague is needed to focus on pre-award work. At the same time, it should be noted that there is significant competition for qualified individuals to fill these roles. The provost noted that, despite the frustrations some have experienced of late, a number of Amherst faculty have received highly competitive grants recently. ([A list of recent grant awards is available online.](#))

Conversation turned to [“The Faculty Statement on Virtual Teaching,”](#) a document that Professor Rangan forwarded to the committee on behalf of a group of faculty signatories. The members agreed that the provost’s guidance surrounding short-term remote teaching during the pandemic ([August 31](#) and [September 13](#)) (the latter in consultation with the Committee on Educational Policy [CEP]), addressed the near-term issues raised by the document. In regard to broader and more long-term questions of how the college might decide to incorporate remote teaching, the members reiterated their view that the CEP is the body that should consider this issue initially. If any changes are contemplated, the faculty as a whole would need to consider the matter. Some members suggested that the CEP consult with members of the faculty who focus on disability studies as part of their scholarship, considering the related intersections with remote teaching; that the CEP also consult with the Office of Accessibility Services; and that the Center for Teaching and Learning could also provide valuable input. Provost Epstein said that there are complexities involved in aspects of these matters, and that the CEP will deliberate about issues surrounding remote teaching that are within its purview, consulting with faculty and college offices, as needed.

The members next discussed [an email from the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning and Success](#). Since receiving the email on September 2, the Committee of Six had considered via email the ad hoc committee’s request that a faculty meeting be held; the purpose would be to have members of the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) present observations about the serious challenges that many students are facing as they make the transition back to campus, or arrive for the first time. (The members did not meet on Labor Day, and today’s meeting was the first since the email was received.) The ad hoc committee had noted that there was a 75 percent increase in calls to the Counseling Center by the fourth day of classes. The Committee of Six was very concerned by this report and had considered calling a faculty meeting. Ultimately, however, it was agreed that a conversation with the faculty might be premature, as students had been on campus for a short time and might begin to feel better after settling in. The provost later requested that the OSA and the Center for Teaching and Learning convey information about the resources that are available to faculty to help support students who are facing challenges. (The provost forwarded [the resultant communication](#) to the faculty on September 10.)

Continuing the conversation, Professor Martini asked what is known about the demographics of students who have contacted the Counseling Center—specifically, the proportion of students who are new to campus, (whether first-years, or others who are new due to delays caused by COVID-19) or returning juniors and seniors. President Martin said that she believes that a greater number of returning students have been

experiencing challenges, in particular, sophomores and juniors, though this information is anecdotal at this point and data are being gathered. Many students appear to be experiencing feelings of isolation and are struggling with how to form connections. It might be that, now that more time has passed, they are beginning to feel less anxious, and this is being monitored closely, the president said.

Professor Umphrey suggested that ways be found outside the counseling center model to address “issues of spirit.” For example, could the college explore rituals and other approaches to commemorating the experience of the last year and encouraging a sense of belonging among all members of the community? The president said that Dean of Students Liz Agosto is making the theme of well-being a priority, with a focus on preventative work. Dean Agosto has been highly effective in drawing on the resources within the Office of Student Activities and Conferences and Special Events to develop programming for students. In addition, the directors of the resource centers have been offering helpful pop-up sessions in tents, which have been well-received. There is, however, recognition that the OSA cannot be the only solution, the president said. Professor Umphrey commented that staff morale, in particular, also seems to be an issue. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez noted that the [Center for Restorative Practices](#) is also a valuable resource for fostering engagement within the community and could be helpful in addressing issues surrounding anxiety and personal safety.

On a related note, President Martin commented that many students seem to be enjoying being on campus and have expressed support for the decision to ease some of the health-and-safety protocols that were put in place for the first two weeks of the semester. On the other hand, some students would have preferred that these protocols remain, the president noted. (Effective Monday, September 13, Amherst shifted to operating at Level 1: Baseline COVID-19 Precautions.) Provost Epstein commented that [an email to students](#) about the updated COVID-19 protocols, which had been sent on September 11, had not been shared with the faculty. She has just learned about this oversight and has asked that the information be sent to faculty. (A link to the email appeared in [the September 16 community planning update](#).)

The committee turned to [an email from Professor Fong](#), in which she proposed that the college offer a summer semester, with the goal of de-densifying the campus this winter and enabling students and faculty to have “a safer option for in-person learning.” She noted that cases of COVID-19 are likely to be lower in the summer. The members noted a number of challenges with this idea, agreeing that the proposal is not feasible. Most prominently, the committee pointed to the fact that a substantial number of faculty already engage with the hundreds of students who participate in summer programs (e.g., the Gregory S. Call Academic Interns Program, the Summer Bridge Program, the STEM Incubator, and the Summer Research Institute, as well as individual research collaborations). In addition, Provost Epstein commented, work on phase I of the college’s ambitious [climate action plan](#) to decarbonize the campus infrastructure will require that the Greenway and King/Wieland residence halls be taken offline this summer. This is being done to support the interconnection with the new systems. This resultant significant decrease in bed capacity would prevent housing students during the summer. Finally, the provost commented that her experience has been that it is very challenging to find faculty members who are willing to teach over the summer.

The members next began a discussion of the purpose and goals of reappointment. While it was noted that it will be important to bring greater clarity to the language describing some of the procedures in the *Faculty Handbook* (III., D.), most of this initial discussion focused on the purpose of reappointment and the Committee of Six’s role in this process. The members agreed that reappointment provides an important opportunity for tenure-track faculty to receive feedback about their trajectory as scholars and teachers, both from their department(s) and the Committee of Six. While service is also considered at this time, efforts are made to protect colleagues from major service obligations during their pre-tenure years, the provost noted; a review of service is not a prominent feature of the reappointment review, she explained. Professor Umphrey noted that reappointment and tenure are not symmetrical processes; during reappointment, the Committee of Six has no access to a candidate’s research. She further noted that the language in the *Faculty Handbook* is vague and would be more helpful if it offered guidance on the relation

between departmental and Committee of Six assessments in reappointment decisions. The committee felt strongly that the Committee of Six should be provided with reappointment candidates' scholarship, as well as with the information that is already provided about teaching. Several members commented that a review of scholarship is part of the reappointment process at institutions where they had taught prior to coming to Amherst, and that this approach works well. The majority of members felt that it would be important for the Committee of Six to read the scholarship to offer its best advice to candidates. Taking this approach could also serve as a safeguard to candidates, in the members' view, providing faculty with a fuller range of perspectives on their past performance, current accomplishments, and future promise. Professor Clotfelter commented that, if a situation arose in which departments were creating barriers to a candidate's success, the committee could help address these issues, including advising the department to be clearer and/or more accurate in its assessment of their candidate in the future. The provost noted that concern about reappointment becoming a "mini tenure review" has been expressed in the past. The members agreed that this should not be the goal; they did not recommend making use of outside reviewers to evaluate scholarship at the time of reappointment. With time growing short, the members agreed to continue this discussion at their next meeting.

At 4:15 P.M. the current members of the Faculty Housing Committee, as well as last year's members, joined the meeting to discuss [the housing committee's proposal to revise the college's home purchase program](#). (Attending were Professors Greg Call, Adi Gordon, Sally Kim, Elizabeth Kneeland, and Caroline Theoharides and ex officio members Jim Brassord, chief of campus operations; Jack Cheney, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty; Jeff Davis, director of treasury operations and analysis; and Kim Eggleston, director of rental housing.) The provost welcomed these colleagues and the Committee of Six expressed appreciation to the members of the housing committee for their work on the proposal.

During a wide-ranging conversation, the members of the Committee of Six posed questions about the proposal. The members reiterated their concern that, if implemented, the proposed plan would provide the greatest benefits to tenured members of the faculty, and would mean that college houses might not be available to faculty and staff who are in earlier stages of their careers. In this regard, they pointed to the proposal that those who currently own college houses be allowed to stay in them for life, rather than being required to sell them back to the college within two years of retiring (the current rule). The committee expressed the view that changes contemplated in the home purchase program should have as a goal allowing more faculty to live near campus, facilitating their engagement in campus life. The committee suggested taking an incremental approach to implementing the housing committee's proposal—for example, limiting initial steps to offering houses for purchase to include tenure-track faculty—and seeing if doing so results in more interest in the houses. The committee also asked the housing committee about the possibility of renovating larger houses to create spaces for multiple individuals and families that could be rented to members of the college community or sold as condominiums.

Professor Call, chair of the housing committee first expressed thanks to President Martin, praising her for the thought, care, and heart that she has brought to her position, and noting that he had been privileged to see that firsthand while serving as dean of the faculty during the first three years of her presidency. The college has evolved during President Martin's tenure, he said, and the Amherst community has much to be grateful for. Professor Call noted that the housing committee's proposal had gone through a series of iterations over a number of years. He informed the members that the current housing committee had spent last spring going through all of the proposals that they had inherited from the prior committee. The 2020–2021 committee was in agreement with the provisions of the draft proposal they inherited, though the members had decided to adjust the matching grant program to make it more generous for the owners of college houses. The goal of this refinement was to provide a further incentive to the owners to maintain the houses; the hope would be that doing so would help retain the houses' value, making them more attractive for resale. Professor Martini suggested that the matching grant program could help meet priorities of the

climate action plan by supporting renovations that would make the houses more energy efficient, for example.

Continuing the conversation, J. Brassord commented that, since the beginning of the home purchase program, few owners have invested in the upkeep of the houses, and many have not availed themselves of the matching-grant program. As a result, the houses are often in very poor condition at the time they are sold back to the college, requiring extensive renovations. The housing committee believes that allowing owners to stay in the houses longer will be another incentive for them to maintain the properties. This change would allow owners to realize the full benefits of renovation projects, after going through what can be a very disruptive and expensive process. Professor Call said that he is aware that the current requirement that faculty leave their college house within two years after retirement can also function as a disincentive for faculty who are considering whether to retire. While faculty often decide to sell college houses prior to retirement, the committee believes that allowing owners to stay in their homes longer could also remove a psychological barrier to making the decision to retire.

Several Committee of Six members expressed the view that allowing faculty to stay in their houses for between five and seven years after retirement, rather than for life, would be preferable. The two committees also discussed the idea of renovating some of the larger vacant houses and turning them into rentals or condominiums. J. Brassord informed the members that, following a rigorous study of the college's housing inventory twelve years ago, a rental subsidy program was put in place. This program has helped meet the demand for college housing for tenure-track assistant professors. It is projected that the conversion of large homes into rental units would result in a surplus of rental housing. If this occurred, the college might be forced to rent units to individuals who are not part of the college community, or sell the houses. In regard to creating condominiums, J. Brassord noted that the college experimented with a condominium model in the early years of the home purchase program and had found it to be problematic on a number of fronts. Ultimately, the units were sold back to Amherst, and this program was discontinued.

Discussion turned to the idea of staggering the implementation of some of the housing committee's recommendations. Professor Call said that the proposals are interrelated and that he would not advise taking this approach. For example, making the houses more affordable is a priority. As is noted in the proposal, one way to achieve this goal is to reduce the purchaser's equity contribution and allow for their ownership stake to increase over time. The committee is confident that adjusting the equity split to 65 percent of the appraised value at the time of purchase, adjusting it to 70 percent after five years, and then increasing it by 1 percent for ten years until the equity split reaches a maximum of 80 percent after fifteen years of ownership would make the houses more affordable, and renew interest in home purchase—particularly if there is also an incentive to maintain the properties. Sustaining these college assets is in the best interest of the homeowner and the college, he noted. Since appreciation takes time, the hope is that owners would stay in their houses, and that there would be stability in the neighborhood adjacent to the college. Professor Umphrey worries that, given current economic trends in Amherst, the houses would still be unaffordable, particularly for pre-tenure colleagues; she noted that the taxes are too high, and the maintenance of large houses is too costly. Inquiring about the intent behind the proposal to increase the matching grant from 10 to 20 percent of a house's market value, she wondered whether, given the pressing needs for renovation, the college could instead simply offer grants of up to 10 percent (or some other appropriate amount) to jumpstart repair and maintenance, without requiring a match. Professor Martini wondered whether a solution might be for the college to build more affordable housing. J. Brassord said that the neighborhoods surrounding the college are so developed that it would be challenging to expand the housing stock. Professor Call noted that doing so would also be a very substantial investment. J. Brassord commented that there has not been significant interest among faculty in purchasing college houses over the past decade while noting that interest might increase if the houses are offered for sale to tenure-track faculty and staff. Professor Schroeder Rodríguez suggested that a survey be done to gauge the interest among faculty and staff in purchasing a college house.

Professor Manion expressed the view that some of the recommendations seem at odds with one another, and that there are too many moving parts. For example, allowing individuals to spend a lifetime in a college house would not support the goal of allowing a greater number of faculty to live closer to campus. Broadening the pool of those who can purchase the houses, while simultaneously locking down the houses by allowing individuals to stay in them for life, also doesn't make sense, she said. Professor Manion agreed with other members that it could be helpful to implement the housing committee's recommendations one at a time, rather than all at once. She finds the proposal to adjust the equity split to be compelling and wonders if that step might be enough to encourage faculty and staff to buy college houses. Perhaps, this idea could be tried first, she suggested. Professor Call stated that, to the housing committee these aspects do not seem at odds: the committee believes that allowing owners to stay in their homes for life will incentivize them to keep their houses in better shape, and thereby generate a larger pool of viable houses (for more faculty) in the long run. Professor Clotfelter raised the possibility of incentivizing retired faculty to sell their homes back to the college by gradually decreasing the equity split in the years following retirement.

The Committee of Six thanked the members of the housing committee for the informative conversation, and they left the meeting at 5:00 P.M. After a discussion of a number of committee nominations, the meeting adjourned at 5:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty