

The tenth 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, February 6, 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.

The meeting began with Professor Call expressing deep sorrow over the death last month of Tanya Leise, Brian E. Boyle Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science. He commented on Professor Leise’s courage and perseverance during her illness and noted that she was the first applied mathematician—and first woman mathematician—to be tenured at the college. President Elliott, Provost Epstein, and the other members also acknowledged this tremendous loss and extended their sympathies. The members next extended a warm welcome to Professor Hasan, who was attending his first meeting of the FEC.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Elliott noted the recent transition in some leadership positions at the college ([see his messages to the community about these appointments](#)). He said that he looks forward to welcoming Mike Thomas, Amherst’s new chief financial and administrative officer (CFAO), who will play an important leadership role at the college, and thanked the members for meeting with the finalists for the position as part of the search process. The feedback that the committee had provided was very valuable, he commented.

Continuing, the president said that he is also delighted that Angie Tissi-Gassoway has assumed the role of interim chief student affairs officer. He has been impressed with A. Tissi-Gassoway’s contributions as a member of the senior staff; leadership as interim chief equity and inclusion officer, including her work with students; and commitment to Amherst’s mission. Students, faculty, and staff have spoken enthusiastically about their experiences and collaborations with A. Tissi-Gassoway, President Elliott noted.

The president next expressed his gratitude to Professor Sheila Jaswal for agreeing to step into the role of chief equity and inclusion officer on an interim basis. The members asked if Professor Jaswal will continue to teach while serving in this full-time administrative role, and the president responded that it is his understanding that Professor Jaswal will continue to co-teach a course this semester, and that some additional resources to support her lab have been provided to enable her to do so. President Elliott informed the members that he is moving swiftly to launch a search for a permanent chief equity and inclusion officer, noting that Professor Pawan Dhingra, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty, and Matt McGann, dean of admission and financial aid, will serve as co-chairs of the search committee for this position, which will be supported by a search firm. Opportunities will be provided for the campus community to meet with candidates during the search process, the president said.

Turning to other matters, President Elliott and Provost Epstein discussed the need to reduce expenses at the college to mitigate the rising costs that have been ongoing for some time (and which may or may not continue), due to inflationary pressures. The president noted that he has consulted with the Committee on Priorities and Resources about the upcoming budget process, and financial planning at the college more generally. President Elliott informed the members that all divisions will be asked to reduce “below-the-line” (non-compensation) budgets by 15 percent. The provost said that, to achieve this reduction, academic departments will soon be advised that they may consider, among other steps, spending available restricted funds fully and/or reducing programming, such as speaker events or field trips. The president and provost emphasized that Amherst’s educational mission will be prioritized and will not be compromised as steps are taken to address the effects of economic challenges. At the college level, the savings that result from these efforts are intended to ensure that there are sufficient resources for annual salary and wage increases for all faculty and staff, without creating overreliance on spending from the endowment. President Elliott and Provost Epstein stressed that there are no plans to eliminate positions at the college that are already filled. On the staff side, requests for new positions will receive greater scrutiny; only those positions that are deemed essential will be allocated.

Professor Polk asked the provost if she could provide further details about the cuts. The provost said

that searches for faculty positions will move forward, and that there are no plans to cut professors' research and travel funds. She expects that there will be savings when departments spend restricted funds (if they have them) on activities that meet fund criteria, rather than relying solely on departmental budgets. Student wages—for example, for tutors—and instructional materials such as lab supplies will not be cut. In regard to the question of whether there is a dollar amount that the college is hoping to achieve in terms of savings, President Elliott said that there is not at this time. There are variables that make it difficult to set a goal of this sort. For example, if the cost of food and energy were to go down, and/or the stock market were to have an enormous recovery, it would make a big difference in regard to having a sense of what is needed. It is hoped that the cuts will result in having a respectable salary pool for increases, President Elliott noted. He said that the college is making reasonable projections and commented that the budget for this fiscal year did not adequately capture the level of inflation that has occurred, which was not anticipated. Thus, the college is playing “catch up,” in regard to high costs that must be paid from this year's budget, while trying to ensure that enough resources are in place to meet next year's expenses.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Martini asked if consideration has been given to thinking about the salary pool differently—that is, to give higher increases to faculty and staff at lower salary levels than those who are paid more. Provost Epstein noted that, over the past thirteen to sixteen months or so, staff, particularly at the lowest income levels, have received a number of wage increases and bonuses. She explained that, in March of 2022, the college announced an increase in hourly pay for non-exempt, benefits-eligible employees at the minimum end of the A0-1 range; an increase in wages for all exempt and non-exempt benefits-eligible employees earning up to \$85,000 by graduated amounts; an increase in the casual employee minimum wage; and an increase in the student minimum wage and that, in July of 2022, all eligible faculty and staff had received a 5 percent wage increase, with additional increases provided for approved faculty and staff promotions. President Elliott stated that no decision has been made yet regarding having increases at higher percentages that are based on income levels, as every allocation of salary increases comes with tradeoffs.

Turning to another topic, the president expressed his serious concern about recent threats to academic freedom in the country, commenting that academic freedom is essential and must remain robust at the college. He noted, as examples, Hamline University's recent dismissal of a faculty member after she showed an artistic depiction of the Prophet Muhammad, and incidents in the state of Florida, including that its Department of Education would not permit a new Advanced Placement course on African American studies to be offered in the state's public schools because it violated Florida's Stop WOKE Act. The members said that they shared the president's concern. Professor Polk asked if the college has experienced any push back about its efforts to examine Amherst's own racial history, including its ties to slaveholding. The president said that he is not aware of any pressures surrounding this project. Professor Hasan said that he and other faculty members are concerned about a lack of openness on campus to a range of perspectives and opinions—e.g., conservative as well as liberal voices. The committee agreed that ensuring that there are different viewpoints represented on campus is critical. The president noted that the college has articulated clearly its commitment to academic freedom through the [Amherst College Statement of Academic and Expressive Freedom](#).

Continuing the conversation, Professor Polk noted that progressives, in addition to conservatives, can feel inhibited about sharing their ideas at the college, given today's sharply divided political climate. It was agreed that Amherst should work toward having a culture in which individuals do not feel constrained by fear that they may be “saying the wrong thing” when expressing views and ideas (with some limits, as noted in the academic freedom statement). In addition, no member of the community should feel threatened as a result of the free exchange of ideas.

On a related note, the president said that he has been reflecting on [the college's mission statement](#), a subject of discussion at a retreat he had held with the senior staff. After reviewing the statement, he

found that it reflects in compelling ways the core values and priorities of the college. In thinking about the new student center project, the president sees it as mission-driven and essential. He noted that the project will be critical for bringing faculty, students, and staff together to form connections, furthering the goal of “promot[ing] diversity of experience and ideas within a purposefully small residential community.” President Elliott also finds the mission statement’s emphasis on providing an education that links students’ learning with leadership to be important, particularly as threats to democratic societies proliferate. He would like to think about the ways that the college can advance this connection.

Under her remarks, the provost noted that, after incorporating feedback received from various groups, she had been pleased to share with the members, ahead of today’s meeting, the final proposals for a department-wide mentoring program for faculty and a [revised chairs’ compensation program](#). The members had discussed earlier drafts of these documents and had expressed support for both programs; plans call for implementing both in fall 2023. Professor Mattiacci raised the question of whether departments should have the option of rotating internal mentors on an annual basis, rather than every two years, as has been recommended. Annual rotation is the practice in her own department, and Professor Mattiacci said that she has found that gaining the perspectives of multiple senior colleagues is helpful. Provost Epstein commented that some tenure-track faculty may favor having more continuity in their mentoring relationship. She said that she would consult with Pawan Dhingra, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty, who had drafted the proposal, to get his thoughts on this question. She will then report back to the committee.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Martini asked if there is a program of differentiated compensation for academic department coordinator (ADC)s that resembles the one being proposed for chairs. Provost Epstein responded that compensation levels for ADCs are already determined, to some degree, based on the size and complexity of departments. She noted that a search is currently under way for the newly established position of [senior coordinator for academic department support](#), which is an outgrowth of the ADC Task Force. One of the responsibilities of the individual who assumes this position will be to review the workloads of ADCs in regard to compensation and equity, and to develop ways to streamline processes that could help address some of the workload pressures that ADCs have reported. In regard to the compensation program for chairs, Professor Martini asked if chairs who are entitled to two course releases will be allowed to take them in the same semester. The provost said that this will not be permitted, and that this is noted in the final description of the program. Professor Martini next inquired whether the criteria for the determination of a department’s size, for the purpose of setting the compensation for chairing, will be the same for departments with many fractional joint appointments as it is for departments that are made up of faculty with single appointments. Provost Epstein responded that the number of fractional appointments will not affect the determination of a department’s size for purposes of compensating chairs.

The members then confirmed the following dates that will be held for possible faculty meetings this spring: February 21, March 7, March 21, April 4, May 2, May 16, and Thursday, May 25 (at 9:00 a.m.) Conversation then turned briefly to some committee assignments.

The committee next discussed the meetings about faculty governance at the college that the FEC and consultant Susan Pierce held with members of the faculty on January 30 and 31. The committee noted the high rate of participation among colleagues and the enthusiasm of attendees for the listening sessions and other meetings. After discussing some of the feedback that was received, the members decided to devote part of their weekly meetings on identifying the governance issues on which they will focus and move forward; it was agreed further consultation with the faculty will be essential to the success of this effort. As a first step, the committee agreed to share via these minutes, [notes that had been taken during the listening sessions and other meetings](#). The members expressed appreciation to Christine Overstreet, director of fellowships, and Nancy Ratner, director of academic projects, for

producing such excellent summaries of what had been conveyed. The members noted, in particular, the following issues that had been raised: the service burden of associate professors; the view that committee service is not as demanding as other forms of service at the college, for example, departmental service (including such projects as departmental handbooks and anti-racism plans in recent years and duties related to the transition within the faculty [e.g., mentoring, faculty personnel processes, searches]); the time that faculty have had to devote to Workday; demands brought on by COVID; and the process of promotion to full professor. In addition, faculty held differing views on the effectiveness of ad hoc committees, it was noted. Provost Epstein commented that the conversations revealed that the faculty is divided about governance, and that professors define and think about service in different ways.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Mattiacci commented on the high level of engagement over the two days, and that everyone seemed to crave more time to be with one another when the two days of discussion concluded. Professor Hasan said that he was struck by one particularly interesting, concrete proposal that had been mentioned in multiple meetings. The proposal was that committees be designated in the following ways: Red (where decisions or tasks must be undertaken by faculty such as the FEC or Tenure and Promotion Committee); Yellow (where it is good but not obligatory to consult with faculty); Green (where faculty only need to be informed). Instead of starting with a blank slate when considering the committee structure, these categories could serve as a starting point. It had been suggested that, perhaps, the “Greens” could be eliminated. It was also noted that there is a difference between faculty governance and shared governance.

In thinking about next steps, the members felt that it might be informative to solicit more information from chairs of major committees, particularly if it was decided that categorizing committees in the ways that had just been described would be productive. Hosting some open meetings with the faculty about governance could also be useful, it was noted. While an incremental approach to making major changes might be necessary, the members agreed that it should be possible to develop some proposals, and to accomplish something tangible by way of change, this semester. Concluding the discussion, the members spoke briefly about the college’s practice of “protecting” tenure-track faculty from committee service, which some tenure-track faculty find infantilizing. It was noted that, while some tenure-track faculty do serve on committees prior to tenure, others don’t. In addition, some faculty who are hired as associate or full professors also do not serve. Provost Epstein commented that, while she supports having tenure-track faculty serve on committees, it should be noted that there are more tenure-track faculty than committee slots at this time, given the demographic shift of the faculty. In addition, due to the responsibilities of a small number of committees, it is not possible for tenure-track faculty members to serve on them, she noted. As a general matter, it was agreed that it would be best if a culture is created in which tenure-track faculty are invited and encouraged to serve on committees.

Discussion then turned to recommendations from the housing committee to make revisions to [the house purchase subsidy program](#) and [non-college rental housing subsidy program](#), to increase some benefits. Professor Mattiacci suggested that it might be useful to articulate why the housing programs are important. The provost noted that the programs support faculty recruitment and retention. Professor Mattiacci next inquired if the provost would describe the housing stock. Provost Epstein responded that there are twenty-six properties in the home purchase program, which includes the six properties that were sold this year. The members expressed appreciation for the housing committee’s thoughtful proposals, for which they expressed full support, as did the president and provost. The provost will now consult with colleagues about the financing needed to implement the proposals, she said. It was agreed that the proposal that the housing committee review the house purchase subsidy program and non-college rental subsidy every two years is a good one.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of [a letter from faculty signatories](#), forwarded by Professor

Boucher, requesting that the college increase the support it provides to the Amherst Public Schools. President Elliott responded that plans are already in place to increase funding, while noting that advancing the goal of helping to improve local schools will require other forms of college engagement beyond financial support, which must have limits. He is considering viable strategies, rather than a focus on tactics, which will take some time, he said. The president also shared his view that furthering engagement with the town should be a priority in a number of areas, noting education; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and sustainability (possibly through carbon offsets) as examples.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty