

The fourteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2019–2020 was called to order by Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein in the president’s office at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, January 27, 2020. Present, in addition to the provost, were Professors Basu, Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder. President Martin participated, via speaker phone, in the first half of the meeting only.

The meeting began with Provost Epstein proposing nominees to serve on the memorial minute committee for Professor of History and Asian Languages and Civilizations, Emeritus, Ray Moore, who died on January 7, 2020. The members agreed that the provost should ask the nominees to serve on the memorial minute committee. Turning to the calendar for faculty meetings in the spring semester, the members decided that the following dates should be held for possible meetings: February 18, March 3, April 21, May 5, and May 21 (commencement meeting). The committee discussed possible topics for spring faculty meetings and agreed that it would be useful to have a conversation about intellectual responsibility and to have a member of the Office of Student Affairs give a presentation as part of the discussion. The committee recalled that Professor Wagaman had raised a number of important issues in [a letter that she had sent to the committee in 2018](#), including the question of whether a teaching evaluation should be solicited from a student against whom a faculty member has made allegations of misconduct. Provost Epstein, noting that, under such a circumstance, a tenure-track professor should make the department chair aware of the matter, agreed that intellectual dishonesty is an important issue. She expressed concern that some faculty members choose not to report incidents of plagiarism to the Office of Student Affairs because they feel they should protect or help a student by addressing the matter informally. Although faculty members can exercise discretion in reporting plagiarism, reporting as a standard practice may reveal a student’s pattern of cheating. She wonders whether it might be useful to have a standard light penalty for a first offense of intellectual dishonesty, such as a warning. This practice might encourage more uniform reporting because the punishment would not be severe unless it was a repeated offense.

Under “Topics of the Day,” Provost Epstein informed the members of her plans to invite nominations, including self-nominations, for three half-time administrative positions at the college that will be held by tenured members of the Amherst faculty. One position (associate provost and associate dean of the faculty) represents an expansion of the leadership team within her office. The new associate provost and associate dean of the faculty will be tasked with thinking broadly and deeply about advising and teaching and learning at the college. (Provost Epstein noted that Professor Gentzler will conclude her term as faculty director of the Writing Center and the Center for Teaching and Learning at the end of this academic year and will not be replaced. As a result, the addition of a third associate provost and associate dean will be cost-neutral.) The provost noted that the other two positions (faculty diversity and inclusion officer and class dean) are existing positions that will become available when colleagues complete their terms at the end of this academic year. All of the appointments will begin on July 1, 2020, and have three-year terms, with the possibility of renewal, she said. Provost Epstein noted that compensation will include course reduction and additional salary. She explained that she would provide the faculty and staff with a short description of each of the positions in upcoming announcements and said that she looks forward to learning of colleagues’ interest in the positions.

Professor Goutte asked the provost why she had decided to create a third associate provost and associate dean of the faculty position. Provost Epstein responded that the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee had recommended doing so, and that she had decided that it would be helpful to have a colleague in her office have a dedicated focus on issues surrounding teaching and learning and on initiatives to support and enhance advising at the college. In addition, she noted, the new colleague will carry out the other responsibilities of this position, including participating in the president’s academic cabinet and serving as a senior advisor to the provost, interviewing candidates for some visiting faculty positions and some administrative positions within the provost’s division, and collaborating closely with colleagues in her office on new and continuing initiatives. The members expressed support for the creation of this position. Professor Goutte commented that the focus of the appointment is representative of a hallmark of Provost Epstein’s tenure as provost and dean—a continuing commitment to supporting and strengthening teaching and learning—which was evident from the outset with the creation of the provost’s annual retreat on teaching and learning, a program that continues to have a positive impact.

Provost Epstein thanked the committee for its support and noted that, in the coming weeks, she will also invite nominations and self-nominations for the position of faculty athletic representative (FAR), which will be held by a tenured member of the Amherst faculty. She explained that, in this role, a colleague will work to promote greater understanding among student-athletes, faculty, and coaches about the role of athletics in students' education. Continuing, Provost Epstein said that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) mandates that member institutions designate a FAR, though the position at Amherst and at most peer institutions has traditionally been underutilized. Following the recommendation of Amherst's Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Athletics, she has decided to expand the position's responsibilities, and to offer compensation for serving in the role. It is her hope that, with these broader responsibilities the FAR will have greater impact on Amherst's campus and across Division III. The FAR will be a resource for the director of athletics, coaches, and student-athletes and will attend meetings of college, departmental, and student-athlete committees, among other duties. Compensation will include a course reduction or a stipend annually. The members expressed support for strengthening the role of the FAR position. Professor Schmalzbauer asked what the term of the FAR position would be. Provost Epstein responded that the learning curve for the position will be steep, and that she has learned that some FARs at other schools occupy the position for years. On the other hand, she feels that the position should rotate with some regularity among members of Amherst's faculty, in this way enhancing the faculty's understanding of athletics through service in this role. She imagines a three-year term, with an anticipated renewal of at least three additional years.

Provost Epstein next informed the members that the election for the Committee of Six will be launched this week. As a result of the current members' leave schedules, there will be six vacancies on the committee, she noted. If a colleague who is elected to the committee later is appointed to one of the administrative positions that she had just described, the individual will not serve on the committee, and another faculty member will be elected to fill the vacancy on the Committee of Six. Given the full turnover in the committee (which is the result of three members completing their two-year terms and three members leaving the committee because they are going on leave during the next academic year), Professor Sims wondered if a list should be made available of faculty who have served in the past on the Committee of Six in case colleagues wish to elect those with prior experience. Provost Epstein commented that past service is not a criterion for future service on the committee, expressing some concern that including this information could introduce some bias into the election process. Professor Sims pointed out that there is nothing to prevent a faculty member from looking through the online archive of Committee of Six minutes and ascertaining past membership. The members also discussed briefly the continuing practice of including tenure-track assistant professors on the Committee of Six ballot in the spring of these colleagues' first year at Amherst, and the implications if an assistant professor were to be elected.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Horton asked President Martin about the meetings of the board of trustees that had taken place in San Francisco on January 24 and 25. The president responded that the meetings had been productive, with follow-up from the summer trustee retreat about admission policy and process being one of the topics of discussion. Some trustees had also joined the president and the senior staff at Alumni Association events in California, President Martin said, noting the board's travel to California had been planned to coincide with these gatherings.

The committee next conducted its annual review of senior sabbatical fellowship proposals and voted to forward them to the board of trustees for approval. The members then discussed the theses and transcripts of students in the class of 2020E who had been recommended by their departments for a summa cum laude degree and have an overall grade-point average in the top 25 percent of the graduating class. The committee voted unanimously to forward these recommendations to the faculty and offered high praise for the quality of the work done by this accomplished group of students. The members then discussed several committee nominations.

Conversation turned to the topic of the teaching prize that the college established last year in honor of Jeff Ferguson, the inaugural Karen and Brian Conway '80, P'18 Presidential Teaching Professor at the Amherst, who died in 2018. Provost Epstein noted that the Committee of Six will select two recipients of the award this spring. Current tenured faculty members, senior lecturers, and senior resident artists who have been at the college for at least ten years are eligible for the prize, and the recipients will be announced at the

commencement faculty meeting. They will give public talks focusing on teaching at or around homecoming and receive an honorarium of \$5,000. With the goal of garnering rich and robust commentary to inform selection deliberations, the members suggested some refinements to the letter in which students, faculty, and alumni are invited to make nominations for the prize, as well as to the nomination form. It was agreed that nominations, which should include examples to support arguments for selecting an individual nominee, should be at least 250 words in length and should not exceed 500 words. Provost Epstein reminded the members that last year's committee had agreed that nominations submitted in previous years should be considered when making decisions in the current year. Her office is maintaining an archive of nominations for each faculty member, and the Committee of Six will be provided with this information on an annual basis as part of the decision-making process. Professor Horton suggested that there should be a time limit on how long nominations are kept and considered, proposing that the period be five years.

Continuing with questions, Professor Schmalzbauer asked about the status of developing a proposal for an alternative time for faculty meetings that would allow for a community hour, and Professor Horton, who supports the idea of identifying an alternative time, raised related issues of the class schedule, teaching slots, and enrollment patterns. Provost Epstein explained that, in 2016–2017, the Ad Hoc Committee on Alternative Faculty Meeting Hours had examined the class schedule, with the goal of finding a way to set aside time that could be used for a community hour, possibly daytime faculty meetings, and department meetings. Following a conversation with the Committee of Six, the ad hoc committee had brought forward a proposal in spring of 2017 that faculty meetings and community hours take place on Thursdays from 1:00 P.M. to 2:50 P.M. and that a new block of course times be created on Tuesday/Friday afternoon (an underutilized portion of Amherst's academic schedule). It had been stressed that, for the proposal to be implemented, a number of faculty/departments would need to be willing to teach in the newly created Tuesday/Friday afternoon time slot. The ad hoc committee had also shared information about the underutilization of current time slots, which are not limited to Fridays. Provost Epstein commented that, at the time, it had been noted that it would be problematic if many faculty/departments switched to a Monday/Wednesday schedule, because of bunching that would occur. More faculty would need to teach on a Tuesday/Friday afternoon schedule for the proposal to be implemented successfully. This is still the case. The provost noted the commonly held view that many faculty members may not want to teach on Friday afternoons, as some colleagues leave the area to travel to conferences, and/or commute to and from Amherst and make use of Friday afternoons for these purposes. Alternatively, if faculty meetings actually shifted to Fridays, it is thought that related problems with attendance for the same reasons would occur. It has been agreed that, if a proposal for a Thursday-afternoon time slot were to move forward, it would be critical to gain a sense, in advance, of how many faculty members would be willing to teach on Friday, otherwise there could be serious repercussions. The schedule for co-curricular activities, including athletics and the arts present other challenges. The provost noted that, most recently, the Committee of Six suggested that Jesse Barba, director of Institutional Research and Registrar Services, take a fresh look at the class schedule, with everything on the table, including assumptions about the viability of early-morning classes and extending the academic schedule into the evening. Provost Epstein said that J. Barba has informed her in the past that he thinks that it may be possible to reserve the noon hour, most likely on Tuesdays and Thursdays, for faculty meetings, a community hour, and department meetings. In order to do this, it would be necessary to extend the academic day until 5:00 P.M. or 5:30 P.M. The provost noted that some labs and seminars already extend into these timeslots, and there could be issues surrounding co-curricular activities if this occurs. She said that she would check in with J. Barba about his current thinking, while noting that the complexities of creating a daytime meeting times may be too challenging to overcome. She also noted that faculty meetings typically only take place two or three times a semester in addition to the Labor Day and commencement meetings.

Potential agenda items for the Committee of Six for the spring term was the next topic of discussion. Provost Epstein reviewed a list with the committee and invited the members to propose additional items. It was agreed that major issues for discussion by the committee will include consideration of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee surrounding advising and college-wide learning goals (the proposal for which had been revised by the Committee on Educational Policy and the Committee of Six and then returned to the Committee of Six after discussion at a faculty meeting); a continuation of the

committee's work to clarify the criteria for tenure, aligning language with practice; finalization of guidelines for the implementation of the common teaching evaluation form for tenure-track faculty; revision of the policy regarding consensual sexual relationships between faculty and students; and consideration of plans surrounding the future of the college's housing program.

In regard to the learning goals, Professor Brooks expressed strong support for the language and tone of the learning goals proposed by the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee as part of its report, which she favors over the revised versions. It was agreed that revising the college-wide learning goals is important and will aid the advising process, and that the committee would return to this issue this semester.

The provost reminded the members that, when the compensation program for chairs was launched as a pilot, it had been agreed that an evaluation would be done at the end of the 2019–2020 academic year. The members decided that the provost should ask J. Barba to develop a survey that could be sent to past and present chairs to assess the program. The committee would review the questions and results, the members agreed.

In regard to finalizing the committee's [draft of guidelines for administering the common teaching evaluation form for tenure-track faculty](#), the members noted that this would be a topic of discussion at their upcoming meeting with the Consultative Group for Untenured Faculty on February 10. The consultative group has consulted with tenure-track faculty about the guidelines, it was noted, and plans to share the feedback that was received and the group's views about the proposal. (Earlier, the committee had consulted with the chairs of academic departments and programs about the guidelines.) Following the meeting with the consultative group, the committee agreed to finalize the guidelines and to discuss matters raised when some Committee of Six members (Professors Brooks, Schmalzbauer, and Sims) and three members (Professors Edwards, Gardner, and Hicks) of the consultative group had met in November, as well as any topics that come forward in February. The members also decided to have a conversation about the short video that has been created to introduce the purpose and importance of teaching evaluations.

The members turned to the topic of the policy on consensual sexual relationships between faculty members and students (*Faculty Handbook*, [IV., A., 3.](#)). The faculty had discussed the committee's proposed revision (below) in a committee-of-the-whole conversation at the November 5, 2019 faculty meeting, and the committee discussed next steps in the context of issues raised during that conversation.

Consensual Sexual or Romantic Relations between Faculty and Students

The integrity of the faculty-student relationship is at the core of Amherst College's educational mission. This relationship vests considerable trust in the teacher, who in turn bears authority and accountability as a mentor, educator, and evaluator. There is scholarly evidence that demonstrates that even when sexual or romantic relationships between faculty and students do not entail harassment, they compromise the integrity of the educational process. They place the student and sometimes the faculty member in a vulnerable position, reduce the instructor's impartiality, and create a disruptive learning environment for all students. Simply having faculty members recuse themselves from supervising, evaluating, advising, or teaching students with whom they had or have a sexual relationship is not sufficient; it deprives those students of educational, advising, and career opportunities.

Because of the unequal institutional power inherent in this relationship and the potential ramifications for the integrity of the educational process, the college prohibits sexual or romantic relations between faculty and students who are enrolled at Amherst College and/or in an Amherst College course, even if the relationship is considered to be consensual by one or both parties. For purposes of this policy, [the definition of faculty in the Faculty Handbook \(II., C.\)](#) applies.

Alleged violations of this policy will be assessed on an individual basis. Violations may constitute grounds for disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Responsibility

for violations of this policy falls on faculty members, who are in positions of greater authority than students. Information regarding an alleged violation of this policy may be submitted to the Office of the Provost and Dean of the Faculty by any individual. The provost and dean of the faculty may initiate an investigation to gather additional information regarding any alleged violations. If the provost and dean of the faculty has reason to believe that the alleged violation may warrant dismissal, suspension, demotion in rank, or deprivation of pay of the faculty member, the process will follow existing college procedures, as outlined in the [Faculty Handbook \(III.I\)](#).

Professor Basu commented that, given that concerns had been raised by faculty about disciplinary procedures, she thinks that the committee should review existing ([Faculty Handbook iii., i., 2.](#)) and other possible procedures to address violations of the proposed policy. Faculty members had also asked for more clarity about the range of penalties that might be imposed, and whether any circumstances might be seen as mitigating—for example, whether a faculty member self-reported a relationship with a student. Continuing, Professor Basu also noted that the research that had been done about the policies at peer institutions had been helpful to the committee, but expressed the view that expanding that research, with a focus on other institutions' adjudication processes and the penalties that they impose for violating their policies, would be helpful to the committee's future deliberations. The other members concurred, and Provost Epstein agreed to have this research done. In addition, the committee decided that it would review carefully the confidential letters that it had received from faculty members about the proposed policy, as well as the committee-of-the-whole notes from the November 5 faculty meeting and previous Committee of Six minutes about the policy. In regard to another issue raised at the faculty meeting—whether exceptions to violating the policy should be articulated—the members felt that this matter could be addressed fairly easily. Professor Brooks, noted, for example, that the scenario of a new faculty member being married to a student before the time of that individual's appointment had been brought forward.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Brooks also commented that any revisions to the proposed policy should continue to stress that, when faculty have sexual relationships with students, those relationships affect the community as a whole, not just the faculty member and the student. As a general matter, the members agreed that the language of the policy should make expectations as clear as possible, and that the goal of the policy is to protect students and the learning environment as a whole. Professor Schmalzbauer expressed the view that it would be beneficial to include a process of restorative justice as part of the process when violations of the policy took place. Professor Horton said that it will be important to stress that any investigations of potential violations of the policy would be conducted by independent investigators who would not be members of the college community, if this is the case. Provost Epstein said that this would be the process that would be followed, and is, in fact, the process used for many serious complaints that arise now.

Professor Sims suggested an alternative approach to the development of the policy, recommending that the current language in the *Faculty Handbook* be revised to convey that consensual sexual relations between faculty members and students be prohibited, rather than discouraged. Other members did not agree with this approach, and it was decided to continue revising the draft proposal above. The members then discussed some possible specific changes to the language of the proposal and agreed to continue their discussion at their next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty