

The fifteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2019–2020 was called to order by President Martin in the president’s office at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, February 3, 2020. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors Basu, Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with Provost Epstein asking for the members’ thoughts about the possibility of moving to a model of hiring one or two lecturers with expertise in teaching intensive-writing courses to teach such courses at Amherst. The idea, which has the support of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), the provost said, would be that such lecturers would be housed in departments, but would teach courses that would not necessarily be “counted” toward the major. A hiring committee could recommend to the provost that a successful candidate for the position be housed in a particular department, based on the disciplinary background of the individual. The provost could then ask the members of the department if they would be interested in hosting the lecturer. Continuing, she noted that her expectation is that the lecturers, whom she feels should hold a Ph.D. and have a disciplinary background, would not have a three-three teaching load, as most lecturers do, because of the demands of the courses that they would teach; they also would not be expected to produce scholarly work. If there is interest in this model, perhaps it could be undertaken as a three-year pilot, Provost Epstein suggested. Professor Horton asked if such lecturers might teach a two-two load and also have other responsibilities, for example within the Writing Center and/or the Center for Teaching and Learning. Provost Epstein said that this would be a possible model for the position.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Sims asked why a new FTE, based in the English department, was not being considered. She understands that some of the faculty members who had previously taught these classes were part of that department. Provost Epstein responded that it is her understanding that the English department does not feel that it should have a special level of responsibility in regard to teaching writing. She also noted that the approach of awarding FTEs to departments, with the explicit agreement that the department would offer an intensive-writing course in exchange (an allocation process that the Committee on Academic Priorities recommended years ago), has not been effective. Departments that made that commitment do not always continue to teach these courses, Provost Epstein explained. Professor Brooks said that it is her understanding that the English department, of which she is a member, has a strong interest in the continuance of intensive-writing courses at the college. The intensive-writing courses taught by Professor Barale and Senior Lecturer Lieber, both of whom are now retired, were listed in the English department, she noted. This had some advantages, in that it made sense to students to be taking these writing-intensive courses in English, and disadvantages, in that some college advisors and students would mistakenly regard the classes as gateway English department courses, rather than courses explicitly designed for students who require additional training in intensive writing. Professor Brooks offered to ask her departmental colleagues for their thoughts about possible models for teaching intensive writing, including the possibility of having a lecturer in the English department, or other departments, who would do so. Professor Basu said that, although she understands the rationale for the provost’s proposal, she is concerned that, under the model, a lecturer might feel marginalized by not teaching courses that count toward the major, when other faculty members in the same department would do so. Other members posed the question of who would mentor the lecturers and be responsible for assembling their reappointment and promotion cases. Professor Brooks wondered if listing intensive-writing courses in different departments might be confusing to students. Professor Goutte said that she agreed. She expressed the view that an intensive-writing course within a department other than English might attract only the subset of students interested in that field of study, whereas an intensive-writing course formally labeled as an English course would attract any student seeking to become a better writer. It was agreed that Professor Brooks should consult with her colleagues in the English department about the idea of hosting a possible lecturer who would focus on teaching intensive-writing courses.

Conversation returned to the topic of the teaching prize that the college has established in honor of Jeff Ferguson, the inaugural Karen and Brian Conway ’80, P’18 Presidential Teaching Professor at Amherst, who died in 2018. The members discussed the letters that would be sent to faculty, students, and alumni requesting nominations for the award. The committee agreed that alumni who have graduated in the past twenty years and current faculty members and students should be invited to make nominations. The members then turned to several personnel matters.

Provost Epstein next shared with the members a draft of a new policy that she feels would provide clarification that is needed regarding teaching loads for tenure-line faculty, now that opportunities for course reduction have become more available (e.g., for chairing departments, service on the Committee of Six, and service in some administrative roles at the college). The provost noted that all faculty members who are not on sabbatical, unpaid leave of absence, or phased retirement are normally expected to teach the equivalent of at least one course per semester. As noted in the draft policy, in most cases, course reductions may not be combined to effect a semester without teaching. The provost anticipates placing language to this effect in the Teaching and Advising section of the *Faculty Handbook* (IV., B.) as a new number 2, with the rest of the sections following consecutively. The provost stressed the importance of Amherst faculty members being present in the classroom and the detrimental impact on students of faculty removing themselves from teaching when not on leave, while noting that the language of the policy allows for flexibility in very exceptional circumstances. The committee expressed support for making this expectation clear and agreed that allowing for the possibility of exceptions makes sense. Professor Basu stressed the importance of flexibility in the case of faculty members who have provided exceptional service and have unusual opportunities to undertake important research and creative work at critical junctures in their professional lives. Professor Goutte commented that the college has been generous in granting course reductions in recent years, and said that she thinks it is reasonable to stipulate limits on combining such reductions. Professor Goutte commented that she can understand the provost's rationale for wanting faculty to teach at least one course a semester when not on leave. The members suggested a few revisions to the draft language, and Provost Epstein agreed to share a revised draft of the policy at the members' next meeting.

Provost Epstein next discussed some revisions (in red caps below) to the college's "topping-up" policy that she has developed to clarify requirements that are already in place (see [Faculty Handbook III., H., 1.](#)) surrounding eligibility for sabbatic leaves in relation to grants and topping up.

Topping-Up Policy

Amherst encourages faculty members, when eligible for **SABBATIC** leave, to apply for outside fellowships and grants that will support and recognize their scholarly and creative work. To offset some of the financial burden that may result from accepting a fellowship **FOR AN EXTENDED SABBATIC LEAVE** at a level below a faculty member's regular salary, the college provides supplemental salary support, **MOST OFTEN TO HELP FUND AN UNPAID LEAVE OF ABSENCE THAT WILL EXTEND A SABBATICAL FROM ONE SEMESTER TO TWO SEMESTERS**. Tenure-line faculty members who take a leave of absence to extend a sabbatical in order to conduct scholarly or creative work under the auspices of an external grant or fellowship are eligible to receive up to one-half of their salary for the period of their leave, up to one year, to bring the fellowship or grant stipend to the faculty member's full salary for that time frame. The amount that the college will "top up" will not exceed the amount of the fellowship or grant award or half of a faculty member's salary. The college will cover any uncovered benefits costs, beyond the funds provided by the fellowship or grant, provided that the faculty member contributes the share of benefit costs normally met by a faculty member. The provost and dean of the faculty will review all topping-up requests. **IF A FACULTY MEMBER IS ELIGIBLE FOR A TWO-SEMESTER SABBATICAL (WITHOUT AN UNPAID LEAVE OF ABSENCE) AND RECEIVES A FELLOWSHIP OR GRANT, THE COLLEGE MAY PROVIDE UP TO TWO-NINTHS OF THE FACULTY MEMBER'S SALARY DURING THE SUMMER BEFORE THE SABBATICAL, THE SUMMER AFTER THE SABBATICAL, OR DURING BOTH SUMMERS, DEPENDING ON THE AMOUNT OF THE FELLOWSHIP OR GRANT AND DURATION OF THE AWARD.**

The provost noted that, under the current leave policy, which is articulated in the *Faculty Handbook*, "Faculty with regular appointments will normally be eligible for sabbatic leaves or unpaid leaves of absence after having completed three continuous years (i.e., six continuous semesters) of teaching. After six semesters, a tenured faculty member is eligible for one of the following during the same academic or calendar year: (1) one semester of

unpaid leave of absence; or (2) two semesters of unpaid leave; or (3) one semester of leave at 80 percent of a semester's salary in combination or not, as wished, with one semester's unpaid leave of absence. Alternatively, regular faculty are eligible for one year of sabbatic leave at 80 percent of salary or one semester of sabbatic leave at full salary after six years of teaching uninterrupted by a sabbatic leave. They are also eligible if the six years of teaching are interrupted by a leave of absence without pay providing the last three years have been continuous." Provost Epstein explained that, while this is the policy, a practice has emerged in recent years that is becoming problematic. Faculty members, in increasing numbers, are applying for and receiving grants and fellowships that will provide some or all of the funding for the professor to go on leave for a period when the individual would normally not be eligible to take a leave or to extend a leave (i.e., when they do not have the necessary number of teaching semesters). These colleagues request to have their salaries topped up, in order to fund a leave that is off cycle.

The provost commented that, while she is pleased that Amherst faculty members are enjoying successful outcomes when applying for grants and fellowships, having faculty members take leaves more frequently than their eligibility normally allows is creating challenges within departments that need to mount their curricula. In addition, she noted, when faculty members are away, for example for two consecutive years, students and departments often suffer, in her view. In addition, there are often financial implications, as the college may need to devote additional resources to replacing faculty members who are going on leave off-cycle. Provost Epstein feels strongly that leaves should normally be taken in accordance with the rules outlined in the *Faculty Handbook*, and developed the changes to the topping-up policy to reflect this view. She said that faculty members should normally apply for grants and fellowships that will offer support for periods in which they are eligible to be on leave or to extend a leave. Provost Epstein commented that she can imagine a time in a faculty member's career, however, when an exception might be made to this policy, and that the revisions to the policy allow for this possibility.

Responding to the challenges that the provost had described, Professor Horton commented that Amherst has a generous sabbatical policy, and he expressed support for reinforcing the *Faculty Handbook* language through the suggested revisions to the topping-up policy. By doing so, practice will more closely align with policy, he noted. Professor Brooks concurred, while expressing the view that allowing for exceptions is important. She wonders if there might be implications for faculty recruitment and retention, perhaps making the college less competitive in these areas, if the topping-up policy became more limited. Provost Epstein said that she has not received questions about the policy from prospective faculty. She believes that among liberal arts colleges, Amherst's topping-up policy is generous. Professor Brooks noted that Amherst is often competing with R1 universities in attracting and retaining faculty and so should be considering R1 leave policies as well. She gave examples of some universities that offer leaves every two years and ensure faculty benefits when outside grants are awarded. She also emphasized the importance of supporting faculty research, as well as the necessity of ensuring that Amherst has enough faculty members to cover courses, chair departments, and make research leaves possible. Professor Schmalzbauer, while agreeing that Amherst should continue to offer strong support for faculty research, said that, in her estimation, Amherst does have leave policies on par if not better than many R1s. In her view, if the college starts trying to match the leave policies of the most generous and prestigious R1s, Amherst should also be looking at where its research expectations stand in comparison to theirs. Professor Sims also expressed support for following the *Faculty Handbook* language and also allowing for flexibility. She noted that, although the college does not engage in a process of "buying out" teaching time in a formal way, the current topping-up policy seems to be similar to this approach. She feels that not all faculty members are aware of their options regarding external grants and leave, so she supports the greater clarity this proposal would bring. Professor Basu asked how often pre-tenure colleagues win grants or fellowships and wish to take leaves off-cycle prior to tenure. She expressed a concern that extended leaves at this stage could limit the information departments have when making decisions about reappointment and tenure. Provost Epstein agreed, also commenting that it is her hope that the Grants Office will dedicate more of its efforts to supporting faculty at all stages of their careers. It was agreed that it would be helpful if there was greater clarity on what is normally permissible under the topping-up policy, and that the provost's proposed revisions to the policy would help accomplish this goal.

Returning to the point raised earlier by Professor Sims, Professor Goutte suggested that the topping-up policy seems to facilitate buying out an extra semester of leave, which she thought was not allowed for faculty in the sciences who receive external grants. She is concerned that the topping-up policy might allow faculty in the humanities and social sciences to extend a leave when they receive grants and fellowships, but not science faculty.

Provost Epstein said that she would do some research on this question and report back at a future Committee of Six meeting.

The members returned to the topic of the policy on consensual sexual relationships between faculty members and students (*Faculty Handbook*, [IV., A., 3.](#)) and discussed ideas for possible revisions to the policy that they had shared with the faculty at the November 5, 2019, faculty meeting (see below).

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 \(III.I\)](#).

Among the issues the committee considered was the possibility of removing the word *romantic*, as the members had suggested previously, and replacing it with another word that could convey with clarity the idea of lavishing inappropriate and undue attention. After thinking about some options, for example, the word *intimate*, the committee decided to strike *romantic* and to bring forward a proposal to prohibit *consensual sexual relations* between faculty and students only. It was noted that faculty members should be aware that behavior that involves lavishing undue attention on students, which might be considered romantic or date-like and consensual initially, could ultimately be seen by a student as harassment. Faculty members should be aware that such behavior can often be inappropriate, and that accusations of sexual harassment are addressed through the Title IX process, the members noted. The members also reiterated the importance of stressing as part of the policy that its goal is to protect students and the learning environment as a whole. It was agreed that the policy, if approved by the faculty, would also protect faculty members by providing clarity that consensual sexual relations between faculty members and students are prohibited, allowing boundaries to be set with less ambiguity.

In regard to reporting or self-reporting relationships between faculty members and students that might be consensual sexual relationships, the members discussed who might report such relationships and to whom, and the possibility of having particular college administrators serve as sounding boards for those who wish to

discuss possible relationships prior to deciding whether to report them. It was agreed that addressing the consequences of violating the policy is also important, noting in this regard that it would be helpful for the committee to review once again the disciplinary procedures that are in place (see [Faculty Handbook, III.I.,1.,2.](#)). Prior to the faculty meeting in which the proposed policy will be brought forward for a vote, the committee decided that it would be helpful to share with the faculty a brief summary of these procedures, given the many steps that they involve. The members then reviewed the adjudication processes used for violations of similar consensual sexual relationship policies governing faculty members in regard to students at some other institutions, noting that most follow either the standard disciplinary procedures (as is the case with the proposed policy) or Title IX procedures for sexual misconduct. The committee decided to provide the faculty with a small number of the policies and processes that they found relevant and compelling, while noting that Amherst should develop a policy that works best for the college. The members also agreed that the confidential letters that it has received from faculty members about the proposed policy, as well as the committee-of-the-whole notes from the November 5 faculty meeting were very helpful and would inform their efforts to finalize the proposed policy.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Basu noted that some colleagues asked why the committee has decided to bring forward the proposed policy at this time. A primary reason, in her view, is the increasing awareness of the harm that consensual sexual relationships between faculty members and students can cause to the educational environment. In addition, she continued, some faculty members are aware of such relationships at Amherst and letters that the committee has received attest to this fact. The members decided to consider whether excerpts of the confidential letters should be shared with the faculty, while noting the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the letter-writers.

The members decided to continue to consider possible revisions to the policy and to finalize their proposal over the next several weeks. It was agreed that a faculty meeting should be held on March 3, and that the committee would bring the policy forward for a vote then. While the committee recognized that March 3 is “Super Tuesday,” it was noted that Massachusetts has early voting ([see information online](#)), which offers a great deal of flexibility for voting between February 24 and February 28. Given the other business of the committee and the time needed to prepare for the discussion, as well as the possible dates that are available for faculty meetings, a meeting on March 3 was considered to be the best option. The provost agreed to inform the faculty about the meeting and to provide information about early voting as soon as possible.

In the brief time remaining, the members began a consideration of the faculty housing program, responding to a [letter sent by Professor Sims to the Committee of Six in August](#). Professor Sims noted that the central proposal of the letter was that the college develop a comprehensive plan for the future of the college housing program. Specifically, the letter suggested that the Committee of Six charge the College Housing Committee and the Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR) with developing a financially specific, long-term production and maintenance plan. Provost Epstein informed the members that it is her understanding that, in accordance with regular governance procedures, the housing committee is currently considering the issues that Professor Sims had raised in her letter, and that the housing committee plans to forward its views to the Committee of Six and the CPR. In her view, it is not appropriate to charge the housing committee when that body is already in the process of responding to the letter. Professor Sims expressed the view that this was also a question of broad college priorities and resources and asked to make the case for why this issue is important, why it should be addressed now, and why she feels that the housing committee and CPR should be formally charged to do so.

In discussing the importance of this issue, Professor Sims noted the role that the housing program plays in helping to build community at Amherst. She commented that the housing program creates opportunities for students to be welcomed into the homes of faculty members and coaches—to share meals and conversation, for example. She is aware that many current and former students feel that these moments and relationships play an important role in the development of their sense of community and well-being while at Amherst and beyond. Faculty members have been encouraged to invite students into their homes, Professor Sims continued, and these opportunities are most accessible to students when faculty members live nearby. She also noted that, when faculty, senior staff, and coaches live close to campus, they find it easier to support the “off-hour activities” (e.g., performances and athletic competitions) of students. In regard to sustainability, another point that Professor Sims said she would like to make is that the college housing program places a

substantial number of people within walking and biking distance of work. In her view, this is the kind of thing that is crucial to the college's climate action plan, which students, staff, and faculty strongly support.

Maintaining these lands and houses is also part of Amherst's broader commitment to sustainability in the community, Professor Sims noted. Specifically, many of the houses have substantial lead paint and asbestos hazards. In her view, there is an institutional responsibility to the community to remediate rather than sell properties with these known hazards. Professor Sims noted that Amherst College also has the responsibility and opportunity to contribute to helping to maintain and increase the housing stock in Amherst generally. The town has a crisis of affordability, she argued, particularly for low- and moderate-income families. High demand for student rentals in the town center has driven up the prices of small houses, putting homes that previous generations of faculty and staff could afford now out of reach for many. Given these constraints, she feels it is particularly important for the college to ensure that its houses are occupied and maintained.

In regard to the question of *why now*, Professor Sims expressed concern that the faculty home-purchase program is facing a potential financial crisis. She said that she hopes that the college can use that crisis as an opportunity to re-invest in and strengthen the housing program, rather than reduce or end it. In her view, the crisis is twofold. She said that the college has several houses that have been sold back or will soon be sold back, but that are difficult to sell because of maintenance needs. At the same time, tenure-track faculty members are receiving tenure and then have no houses to purchase. Right now, she commented, there are six-to-eight properties that are vacant, but that could be used for housing faculty and staff—whether as part of the home-purchase program or as rentals. In Professor Sims's view, this has been a crisis that has been building slowly, but that is now here. She believes that, if the college plans now, Amherst has a good opportunity to keep the program viable for the future. She suggested that the college could take advantage of the fact that the current Town Council is supportive of development and change. This may facilitate possibilities such as using the Dakin Estate-land to build new housing, or renovating existing houses in order to increase density of units and improve affordability. Most ambitiously, she expressed a hope that future housing opportunities created by the college could be more affordable and could be open to staff members. Professor Sims believes that, if Amherst can invest in both the rental and the home-purchase houses, these buildings will be an asset that is really useful and valuable to the college in the long run. Other colleges and universities are making a commitment to housing, she noted, commenting that her letter draws on examples from Princeton. That institution has made substantial investments in this direction because that institution is also located in a community with high housing prices, Professor Sims noted.

In answer to the question of why to charge the CPR and housing Committee, Professor Sims said that a concrete plan would need to have budget numbers attached to it. Continuing, Professor Sims said that she also hopes that a strategy will be developed with a range of voices and faculty input. She argued that a formal charge would empower the CPR and housing committee to work together, because a solution requires decisions about resources. Concluding, Professor Sims said that she feels that addressing this issue is part of Amherst's broader mission to care for its lands, the landscape, and the community. She praised the college's efforts to create positive community and be engaged in civil society. Professor Sims expressed hope that Amherst will continue to think strategically about the future of the lands owned by the college, and the positive leadership role Amherst can play in building sustainable communities

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty