

The tenth 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, November 18, 2019. Present, in addition to the president, were Professors Brooks, Goutte, Horton, Schmalzbauer, and Sims; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder. Professor Basu was absent.

The meeting began with a brief update about the November 14 meeting that the committee had organized with the Consultative Group for Untenured Faculty to learn about the group’s views of [the committee’s draft of guidelines for administering the common teaching evaluation form for tenure-track faculty](#). Three of the four members of the consultative group (Professors Edwards, Gardner, and Hicks) and three members of the Committee of Six (Professors Brooks, Schmalzbauer, and Sims) participated. The committee members who had attended reported that the discussion had been informative and productive. They suggested that it would be useful to discuss the conversation in more detail at a later meeting, in the interest of time, as there were many important insights and questions to convey. It is the committee’s understanding that the consultative group will seek feedback from tenure-track faculty members about the draft guidelines and the evaluation process and will share the feedback with the Committee of Six. The committee will then consider the response from tenure-track faculty, as well as the views expressed by the chairs of academic departments and programs at an earlier meeting, and finalize the guidelines.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Sims requested that [a letter that she had written to the Committee of Six in August](#) be forwarded to Committee on Priorities and Resources (CPR). In the letter, she proposed that a comprehensive plan be developed for the future of the college’s housing program. Professor Sims commented that it is clear to her that the Committee of Six’s full agenda will not permit a discussion of this issue this semester, and she feels that the matter is pressing. This is because, in her opinion, it would be desirable to fix or redevelop the multiple vacant or underutilized residential properties currently owned by the college in a timely fashion. In addition, there are members of the college community currently making decisions about housing who need clarity about possible changes in the program or opportunities for additional housing, she noted. The capital needs for revitalization of housing assets could productively be discussed in tandem with other planning concerns currently being considered by the CPR, in her view. Provost Epstein suggested that the letter instead be sent to the College Housing Committee, commenting that it is the appropriate body to consider the issue. Professor Sims noted that she agreed that the housing committee is an important body to consider these issues and that this committee is already considering ways to make the best use of college-owned properties (and had received a copy of the letter in August). She feels that the CPR should also be considering the proposal, as there are substantial resource issues to evaluate. The provost said that she would forward Professor Sims’s letter to the CPR. Professor Sims thanked Provost Epstein for her work to move this issue forward.

Continuing with questions, Professor Sims reiterated her interest in learning whether the number of offices and classrooms that will be gained as a result of the renovation of the house located at 197 South Pleasant Street, as well as the Keefe Campus Center, will meet the anticipated need for additional offices. She does not know what the actual need is, but put forth a guess that at least forty offices might be required to house staff currently in Keefe and staff and faculty currently in the basement of Chapin Hall, and to accommodate staff who are now being moved off campus, as well as the planned growth in the faculty FTE cap. Provost Epstein responded that Jack Cheney, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty, is still preparing information for the committee regarding this question. President Martin explained that it is not yet known how many offices the renovation of the house at 197 South Pleasant Street will yield, as the architects are just beginning to consider the project. She said that, presently, there are only rough estimates of the number of offices that will be generated through the Keefe Campus project. Referring to the two projects, President Martin said that the details of the project on

South Pleasant Street will be known first. She anticipates that the two projects will result in at least forty new offices, while stressing that Amherst's space needs, like those of virtually all colleges and universities, are always changing. Professor Goutte suggested that, with planning beginning for a new student center, there might be an opportunity to make efficient use of some spaces in the student center by using some spaces to hold class meetings during early morning hours, when they are not needed for student extracurricular activities.

President Martin responded to Professor Goutte's proposal by noting that planning for the student center is in the very early stages; the possibility of incorporating academic spaces into the building will be considered, along with a number of other competing priorities. Students have made it clear, however, that what they need is a place that belongs to them, that is removed from spaces associated with academic pressure, and that supports separate forms of engagement surrounding recreation and relaxation. The president commented that it will be important for students to feel a sense of ownership of the student center. Creating a student center in which academic functions take place may make it challenging for students to see the space as their own, in her view. Professor Brooks recounted her recent experience holding an event in a residence hall. She believes that a different kind of atmosphere was created because the event took place in student-centered space, and that this sense of community contributed to the event's success. Professor Brooks supports the idea of creating more student-facing spaces on campus that can be used in myriad ways, including contributing to intellectual life at the college. Professor Sims agreed with the need for more student-centered space, and she wondered if academic experiences could take place in a wing of the student center that might also include offices for staff. The wing could have doors that could be closed in order to separate the space from the rest of the building, as needed, and could be left open otherwise. She also noted that she had taken seminars as an undergraduate that were held in "student-owned" buildings close to campus, and that having classes in these spaces did not detract from students' sense of ownership or ability to relax in those locations after hours. President Martin said that all possibilities will be explored, while commenting that offices of student affairs staff who focus on student-conduct issues would definitely not be included in the new student center. Provost Epstein commented that other approaches to solving needs surrounding classrooms should also be considered—for example, re-examining the class schedule, including exploring the possibility of having evening classes and opening up time slots in the afternoon that are currently not used because of athletics practices and contests. The provost noted that having more classes take place on Friday afternoons, so that classes are more spread out, would also expand the availability of classrooms.

Conversation turned to [a letter from Karu Kozuma, chief student affairs officer](#), asking that the committee review a policy that is being proposed to ensure that student organizations at Amherst do not serve as "fronts" for outside organizations. According to K. Kozuma, at present, outside organizations may try to gain access to the Amherst College community by using student organizations as entry points. Through the policy, the college is seeking to outline how a student organization can work with outside organizations, while remaining the primary group organizing an event or program. Some members asked for further clarification. President Martin explained that outside organizations should not provide 100 percent of the funding needed to hold an event on campus. There must be student interest, not just interest by the outside group, and the student organization must provide at least half of the necessary funding. Professor Horton asked what would happen if a student organization agrees to hold an event on campus and to pay for half the costs, when, in fact, the organization does not have the funds to do so. President Martin said that this situation is not likely to happen because the college would not sign a contract unless the student organization can prove it has the necessary funds. Professor Brooks commented that, prior to the meeting, she had done some quick research and had found that many schools have a policy of this kind. The committee agreed that the policy should be framed to emphasize that its purpose is to support the leadership role and agency of student organizations when it comes to

organizing events that they wish to sponsor, rather than simply serving as a list of prohibitions. The members then proposed revisions (shown in red below) to the draft policy that K. Kozuma had sent with his letter. Provost Epstein agreed to share the committee's suggestions with K. Kozuma.

~~Fronting Policy~~

Off-Campus Funding Policy for Student Organizations

Student organizations are welcome and encouraged to host events under the name of their registered student organization (RSO) that they directly plan, fund, supervise, and attend. However, event organizers and organizations must adhere to the following policy:

- Student organizations and individuals are prohibited from serving as "fronts" for off-campus organizations. This means that student organizations cannot sponsor, schedule, or plan events ~~in order to~~ for the purpose of give-giving off-campus organizations unaffiliated with Amherst College access to College space, marketing resources, the College name or likeness, or other College resources.
- ~~Student organizations are welcome to host events under the name of their organization (RSO) which they directly plan, fund, supervise, and attend.~~
 - The student organization must be involved in all areas of event planning, event promotion, and day-of execution.
 - The student organization is required to coordinate with the Office of Student Activities in order to develop contracts, venue setup, security, and other logistical matters pertaining to the event.
 - The student organization accepts all responsibility for event finances, including but not limited to those of the non-Amherst co-sponsoring organization should it fail to meet its commitment.
 - The student organization remains accountable to Amherst College for the actions of any non-Amherst organization with which it is hosting the event.
 - A student organization may receive partial funding for its event from an off-campus organization as long as the student organization complies with policies herein and receive written approval through the Office of Student Activities at least twenty-one days in advance of the event date.
 - No funding will be accepted from an outside organization that is more than 50 percent of the cost of the event.
 - All outside funding sources, amounts, and methods for transfer must be disclosed prior to approval.

- All finances and contractual processes must be run through the Office of Student Activities for appropriate processing and accounting.

Following up on the committee's earlier conversations of the semester about the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee surrounding advising, Provost Epstein asked the members what they recommend regarding next steps. For example, she asked, should proposals for change be brought to the faculty? Professor Horton commented that it seems premature to consider next steps before gathering more data to inform decision-making. He noted that the information about advising that is available is not robust and that much of the information is dated at this point, having been drawn from the responses over the years to the senior survey and to the COFHE (Consortium on Financing Higher Education) survey in which the college participates, and from the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Advising, which issued its findings in 2012. For example, it would be interesting to learn if efforts to improve advising have had an impact, he said, and the other members agreed. Continuing, Professor Horton said that he wonders, for example, if students' impressions of college advising is more positive, now that progress has been made on reducing significantly the number of first-year students who are reassigned to a new advisor after the add-drop period concludes. Professor Horton reiterated his view that new questions about advising, constructed and framed to elicit the most helpful information, should be added to the senior survey and the COFHE survey. Simply asking students if they are satisfied with advising is not useful, in his view. In addition, he suggested that qualitative research, for example constituting student focus groups, should be conducted. Professor Goutte concurred. In particular, she noted, it would be helpful to learn, from the student perspective, about the specific sources of dissatisfaction with college advising. Professor Sims agreed and commented that it would be helpful to examine survey results by year and to try to determine whether factors such as students' majors and whether students are assigned a college advisor in their field, or not, have had an impact on the ways in which students see college advising. She wonders whether such a study might reveal whether the rate of dissatisfaction has decreased over time, because of the changes that have been made surrounding advising, and because many of those advising are relatively new to the faculty at this time.

Provost Epstein agreed that it would be helpful to update older data and also to try to gather new information about advising. Professor Brooks concurred, expressing the view that much of the information that the college has about what is working about college advising, and what is not, appears to be largely anecdotal. Given that the Office of Institutional Research is stretched at this time, she suggested that it might be helpful for departments to dedicate a department meeting to asking clear questions about college advising and to sharing what they learn at a chairs' meeting. She commented that, while some advisors have built up a great deal of knowledge about departments across the college, other advisors, including those who are relatively new to the college such as herself, may struggle with advising students about courses in curricular areas and fields that are outside the faculty member's own, despite the useful orientation training for faculty, which provides guidance and information on multiple departments. Professor Horton pointed out that advisors do not need to be experts on all departments' courses and majors, but rather need to know where they should advise students to find the information they need. Provost Epstein agreed and noted that the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning's website-navigation working group is considering ways to highlight pathways through the curriculum and different majors, which should be helpful for both students and advisors. Professor Horton applauded this effort, noting that, regrettably, some students, particularly in STEM, often declare their major as early as their first year now, in order to have an advisor in the field that they want to study.

Continuing the conversation, Professor Horton wondered whether some changes that might be needed could be accomplished administratively—for example finding ways of having a more

equal distribution of college advisees among advisors, as well as shifting the culture so that college/ orientation advising is seen as a responsibility that should be shared by the faculty. Professor Schmalzbauer said that redistributing advising loads would represent a foundational change that would have a great impact, noting that it is challenging to provide a high-quality advising experiences when faculty have a large number of advisees. Provost Epstein expressed the view that the culture around advising at the college has already changed in some ways, noting that many faculty who participate in the intensive-advising program have reported that the experience has changed the way in which they advise all students. Professor Horton commented that the curriculum committee also discussed the need to change the culture of advising. For example, while some faculty currently conduct advising via email and do not meet with their advisees in person, it would be beneficial if this approach were to be viewed as unacceptable. Professor Sims commented that advising might be improved if untenured faculty were to receive some sort of “credit” for advising. Currently, advising does not factor into the faculty personnel process, she noted. President Martin suggested that some research be done on Brown University’s approach to pre-major advising, as Brown also has an open curriculum. She said that she has seen a promotional campaign on social media describing Brown’s open curriculum and wonders whether faculty there have come up with effective pre-major advising programs. Professor Goutte suggested that perhaps a distinct name is needed to draw attention to the importance and difference of pre-major advising versus major advising. She suggested calling a college advisor an “open-curriculum advisor” to help change perceptions about the role. After a student declares a major, the student would switch to a “major advisor.” She suggested that this approach might reduce some dissatisfaction with advising because students would not expect their “open curriculum advisor” to know how to advise them about the major they want, and would make them more likely to seek input from chairs or other faculty in the majors in which they are interested. The committee expressed support for this new nomenclature. They agreed that this shift in language could potentially solve the problem of students seeking advice on particular majors or precise career paths from their college advisors. It could also help students to focus on the advantages of the open curriculum, as opposed to focusing on the quest for a major or post-college career. The provost said that she would be in touch with colleagues at Brown. She does not think that the school uses professional advisors, but she will find out as part of her broader inquiry.

In regard to other useful data, Professor Brooks recommended that the Office of Institutional Research be asked to assess the viability—from a numbers perspective—of another idea that Professor Goutte had suggested earlier—i.e., having faculty tie their leave schedules to the number of college advisees they take and to their participation in orientation advising. Professor Goutte had proposed that, if a faculty member were to take eight college advisees during orientation after returning from leave, that colleague would presumably carry those advisees for at least two years and would not need to take additional advisees during the individual’s second year after returning from leave, or to participate in orientation advising that year. Under the proposed system, faculty would automatically receive college advisees when they returned from leave. This system would not rely on volunteerism, which would eliminate some of the uncertainty and other challenges that the dean of new students faces under the system, in her view. Professor Horton said that it will be important to try to figure out whether there could be unintended consequences of taking this approach. Provost Epstein agreed to ask Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, to research this idea. Professor Horton asked about curriculum committee’s proposal that an associate dean be added to the provost’s office to support advising efforts. Provost Epstein said that she is considering this idea.

The committee next discussed orientation advising and the responsibilities of faculty during the last week of August. The members, with the exception of Professor Sims, said that they generally favor requiring faculty members who will not be on leave and who have fewer than eighteen advisees to participate in orientation advising on campus. Taking this step would bring

needed clarity about the role of the faculty in orientation advising, the majority of the members agreed. Professor Sims prefers the current system and the flexibility that it offers, she noted. Professor Schmalzbauer reiterated her view that faculty should be permitted to request waivers from orientation advising when circumstances make it very difficult for them to participate. As a general matter, the majority of the committee also felt that the last week of August should be considered a work week for faculty. However, they also reiterated the importance of preserving the summer schedule for research and writing. The provost noted that faculty members have nine-month appointments and are paid over twelve months. Since many faculty begin the summer break in May, immediately after commencement, returning to campus during the week before Labor Day is still within the nine-month window of work under such a schedule. In addition, Professor Schmalzbauer pointed out that the college offers a very generous leave policy to support faculty research. In her view, the difficult question about whether to require faculty participation in orientation advising is rooted in Amherst's ambiguous identity as both a serious research and teaching college. In this case, something has to give, either research time or attention to students. The majority of the committee advised that, for these reasons, faculty no longer receive additional compensation for returning to work at this time and for participating in orientation advising. To ensure that as much time is preserved during the summer for scholarship and writing, the president suggested once again the possibility of rearranging the orientation schedule to allow advising to take place later, for example on the Friday before Labor Day. Provost Epstein reiterated her concern that taking this approach would not leave sufficient time for staff in the registrar's office to resolve complicated registration issues before the start of classes.

The meeting adjourned at 5:26 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty