

The ninth 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, December 19, 2022, at 4:00 P.M. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Coráñez Bolton, Martini (via Zoom), Mattiacci, and Polk; President Elliott (via Zoom); Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with Professor Call offering congratulations to Professor Coráñez Bolton on his recent appointment to the position of faculty equity and inclusion officer (FEIO), which will begin on January 1, 2023, as well as on his promotion to the rank of associate professor with tenure, an appointment that will begin on July 1, 2023. The members responded with applause. Continuing, Professor Call noted that, while the members will miss Professor Coráñez Bolton's presence on the FEC, colleagues are grateful to him for assuming the position of FEIO. (Faculty in administrative roles cannot serve as faculty members of the FEC.) Professor Coráñez Bolton thanked the members. Professor Call also asked the provost about the circumstance that had led to a mid-year appointment to the FEIO position. Provost Epstein responded that Professor del Moral, who assumed her appointment as an FEIO on July 1, 2021, has received a fellowship and resigned her position before the completion of her term; she will be on leave in spring 2023 to pursue this opportunity. The provost noted that the FEIOs conduct exit interviews with all candidates for faculty positions, so two colleagues are needed in this role. Professor Call inquired whether the provost and Professor Coráñez Bolton had given thought to having him serve for three-and-a-half years, so that future appointments would not be out of sync with a July 1 start date. The provost said that she would consider this proposal, but that, for now, Professor Coráñez Bolton has been appointed for a three-year term, with the possibility of renewal. Professor Call thanked the provost for the clarification she had provided.

Under his remarks, President Elliott commented that he is pleased that the fall semester has gone so smoothly. He informed the members that, in the coming weeks, he will be seeking guidance about the college's budget for next year, a process that will include consultation with the Committee on Priorities and Resources prior to the administration developing a proposal that will be forwarded to the board of trustees. Noting other priorities at this time, the president said that the administration will remain vigilant about continuing to monitor the course of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. He then expressed gratitude to the members for agreeing to meet with those candidates for the chief financial and administrative officer position who will soon be coming to campus for interviews; the president said that he looks forward to the committee's feedback.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Mattiacci informed the members that some colleagues have asked her to inquire whether there are plans to return to the use of clickers as a means of electronic voting at faculty meetings. Provost Epstein said that the clickers require a tremendous amount of staff time to maintain, and that there are no plans to use them at this time. After a brief conversation, it was agreed that staff in Information Technology should be consulted to explore other viable tools for electronic voting, with the request that proposals then be shared with the FEC. Associate Provost Tobin agreed to contact David Hamilton, chief information officer, about this issue.

Continuing with questions, Professor Mattiacci inquired, on behalf of some colleagues, whether there will be an opportunity for individual faculty members to weigh in on their preferred meeting time for faculty meetings. While the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has asked departments to comment on the proposal that faculty meetings be held on Friday afternoons, Professor Mattiacci said that some colleagues have indicated to her that they would prefer to be asked directly about their views via a poll. Provost Epstein responded that, based on past surveys, she believes that the faculty would be divided on their views on the available options for meeting times. In her view, seeking individuals' personal preferences at this stage would be tantamount to voting, before a formal proposal has been made and any discussion by the faculty can take place. The CEP is not asking for preferences, she noted, but instead for department chairs to consult with their colleagues to convey the ways in which a Friday

meeting time would affect the academic schedule within their department. Professor Mattiacci thanked Provost Epstein for clarifying the CEP's intention. Professor Martini suggested that three choices for meeting times be brought to the faculty, and that ranked-choice voting take place at a faculty meeting. In her view, prior to such voting, the CEP should articulate the pros and cons of each option, with respect to the impact on the academic schedule. Provost Epstein explained that, once the CEP forwards its proposal to the committee, the FEC will decide how best to move forward. Professor Mattiacci asked how many faculty members had attended the December 6 faculty meeting. The provost said that there were about 120 faculty members, in addition to administrators.

Conversation turned to the optimal way of moving forward with selecting Professor Coráñez Bolton's successor on the FEC, given that a new member is needed to fill a tenure-track slot on the committee, beginning at the end of January. After some discussion, the members decided that an election will be started by January 15, 2023, to elect a tenure-track faculty member to serve on the FEC for the spring 2023 semester only, basically completing Professor Coráñez Bolton's term. In addition, the members agreed that assistant professors who will become tenured members of the faculty on July 1, 2023, will be asked if they wish to be on the ballot for that election, as will other tenure-track faculty who meet the necessary criteria. (It was noted that two separate elections will be conducted this spring to select the two tenure-track members of the committee for the next academic year, and to select replacements for any tenured members who will be rotating off the committee.) The members then suggested some options for compensating the new tenure-track faculty member who will serve this spring. Having heard various possibilities, the provost said that she will consult with the president about the most appropriate compensation. The members then turned to some committee nominations.

The topic of when to hold the next faculty meeting was then discussed. It was agreed that a meeting will be held on February 7, and that included on the agenda will be the motions that were not decided at the December 6 meeting (the CEP's Latin honors proposal and that committee's proposal surrounding the maximum number of courses for which students can receive credit for thesis work during their senior year). In addition, the members asked the provost to invite Tom Davies, executive director of planning, design, and construction, to offer a brief update on current building projects, including work that is a part of the college's climate action plan. She agreed to do so.

Prior to the December 6 faculty meeting, at the CEP's request, the members had agreed to a modest revision to the language about credit for thesis work that had appeared on the agenda originally. Since time did not permit that motion to be moved at the meeting, the members decided to discuss this revised language briefly, and to vote on it. The motion language under discussion, in its original form, is shown below in red text that has been struck, with the new proposed language in red text. Professor Mattiacci raised some concern that, under the proposal, students who are doing two theses could receive credit for six courses during their senior year for doing thesis work, and those doing three theses could receive credit for nine courses. Professor Call said that he understands that this is the CEP's intention. At present, the number of courses for which thesis students can receive credit is based on the practices of departments, which vary. With its proposal, the CEP hopes to set a college-wide policy. Professor Mattiacci expressed appreciation for this clarification. Professor Martini commented that she has been told that, in the past, some students received more than six courses of credit for thesis work. Provost Epstein said that she believes that Professor Martini was referencing work done under the college's [Independent Scholar Program](#), rather than thesis work. Over the years, she explained, a very small number of students have participated in this program, usually in the junior or senior year, in lieu of a traditional major program. Independent Scholars are "free to plan a personal program of study under the direction of a tutor, chosen by the student with the advice and consent of the committee [the Faculty Committee on Academic Standing and Special Majors]."

The members then voted five in favor and zero opposed on the content of the motion below and

five in favor and zero opposed to forward the motion (with introductory language) below to the faculty.

The Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) is proposing some minor changes to the language regarding thesis courses in the Amherst College Catalog to codify the longstanding practice that students can receive credit for a maximum of three courses during their senior year for each thesis. In addition, the CEP is proposing that language (see below) also be added to the academic policies webpage to make this policy explicit.

Motion

That the clarifying language shown in red be added to the course requirements section of the Amherst College Catalog immediately.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All students except Independent Scholars are normally required to elect four full courses each semester. Students may elect one or two half courses in addition to four full courses at their discretion and without special permission. Half courses are not normally included in the requirement of thirty-two courses for the degree; however, with the permission of the academic advisor and the class dean, a student may combine two half courses to be counted as equivalent to a full course if (1) the student completes the 4.5 courses in one semester and 3.5 courses in a subsequent semester, or (2) the two halves match within the same semester in a manner designated by the offering department, with the approval of the offering department (in this case, the student's program will be three or four full courses and two half courses). No more than four half courses may be so combined for credit toward the degree.

Students can receive credit for a maximum of three courses during their senior year for each thesis.

In exceptional cases a student may, with the permission of both the student's academic advisor and class dean, take five full courses for credit during a given semester. Such permission is normally granted only to students of demonstrated superior academic ability, responsibility, and will. Fifth courses cannot be used to accelerate graduation. On occasion, a student who has failed a course may be permitted to take a fifth course in a given semester if, in the judgment of the Committee on Academic Standing, this additional work can be undertaken without jeopardizing the successful completion of all courses taken in that semester. Students may only retake a course for which they have received a failing grade or from which they have withdrawn in a prior semester.

A student who by failing a course incurs a deficiency in the number of courses required for normal progress toward graduation is usually expected to make up that course deficiency by taking a three- or four-semester hour course at another approved institution during the summer prior to the first semester of the next academic year and no later than the semester prior to the student's last semester at Amherst.

Students may not add courses after the last day of add/drop at the beginning of each semester or drop courses after this date except as follows:

In any semester prior to the final year, a student who experiences severe academic

difficulty and has exhausted all academic resources (e.g., met with professors during office hours, received tutoring, met with class deans, etc.), may be allowed to withdraw from a course without penalty and graduate with 31 courses. This exception may be invoked only once, and requires permission of the instructor, advisor and class dean. The deadline for withdrawal requests is the end of the tenth week of the semester.

Further exceptions shall be made for disabling medical reasons or for reason of grave personal emergencies, and shall be made by the class dean.

All course deficiencies must normally be made up prior to the first semester of the final year, except those arising in the final year, in which case they must be made up prior to graduation. All make-up courses must be approved in advance by the registrar.

Courses taken by a student after withdrawing from Amherst College, as part of a graduate or professional program in which that student is enrolled, are not applicable toward an Amherst College undergraduate degree.

The members next considered the committee's agenda for the spring semester. Provost Epstein commented that last year's Committee of Six had envisioned that the FEC, during its inaugural year and with the support of consultant Susan Pierce, would spend much of its time working on a proposal for a streamlined committee structure as part of the faculty governance/citizenship project. The first step of that project was to divide the Committee of Six into two separate committees, the Faculty Executive Committee and the Tenure and Promotion Committee, she noted. Professor Call expressed his strong preference for having the FEC engage with the faculty directly about this important matter. The goal would be to learn more about colleagues' views on the principles and core values that should govern the committee's thinking going forward—and approaches and directions that might be taken to address the concerns about service that some faculty members have expressed. While the focus of much of the work thus far has been on streamlining the committee structure, it is his hope to have faculty participation in this endeavor at a higher level at this stage. (See the views that Professor Sims shared about the project in [her email to the committee](#) of December 11, 2022.)

Continuing the discussion, Professor Call commented that faculty have different perspectives on these issues. For example, it appears that some tenure-track faculty members feel that the expectation at Amherst is that they produce scholarship at a rate that is equivalent to that of a research university. As a result, the colleagues can feel constrained when it comes to spending time on service. Professor Polk, who commented that he has not been a tenured faculty member for all that long, agreed that many tenure-track colleagues feel the pressure that Professor Call had described. In this context, he feels that it is important to address the question of what it means to be a research college and how Amherst accounts for itself in this regard and, eventually, to come to a shared understanding. Professor Call concurred and noted that other important questions include how the faculty shares its responsibilities to the life of the college, including how to distribute service in equitable ways. A common complaint, he noted, is that a small number of faculty are asked to serve over and over again, while others may not be engaged. Another question is to think about ways to make service meaningful. While service should not be equal in importance to scholarship and teaching, colleagues have agreed that it is important that service be recognized.

Professor Polk wondered whether those committees that meet only a couple of times a semester might be the ones on which some faculty may prefer to serve. The members agreed that it would be helpful to gather and share information about the committees, with the goal of developing a common understanding of the functions of these bodies, the time commitment that is involved when serving on them, and whether those who serve have found their experiences to be meaningful. Professor Call noted the example of the

Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid (FCAFA) as a committee of consequence, explaining that he does not agree with the idea that the committee may not be necessary, as was suggested last year. In his view, the FCAFA provides an essential way for faculty to weigh in on crucial principles, values, and policy issues. Professors Mattiacci and Coráñez Bolton said that they like the idea of providing more information about the historical context of committees at the college, including the evolution of the roles of these bodies. They believe that doing so would be particularly useful for tenure-track faculty. They also expressed support for creating a forum for cross-generational conversations about the pressures that some tenure-track colleagues are experiencing. Professor Mattiacci commented that she is aware that some tenure-track faculty find it frustrating that some tenured colleagues have the impression that tenure-track faculty members do not want to engage in service and are not committed to the life of the college. In fact, those who are in the early stage of their Amherst career may feel that they do not have time to participate. Both Professor Martini and Professor Call recalled that groups of faculty had engaged in cross-generational conversations of this kind several decades ago, as part of an effort funded by the Mellon Foundation, and had found them valuable.

The members decided to organize listening sessions with small groups comprising faculty members at different stages of their careers at the college, potentially to be held on Monday, January 30, and Tuesday, January 31, dates when S. Pierce will be on campus. It was further agreed that members of the FEC and S. Pierce would facilitate the sessions, and that notes would be taken to inform the members' future deliberations. Professor Polk suggested that the committee meet with department chairs as well, and the members thought that it might also be a good idea to meet with the chairs of faculty committees.

In regard to the committee's other work this spring, it was agreed that the members would soon review two proposals that the College Housing Committee had just forwarded, one that relates to the House Purchase Subsidy Program, and the other to the Non-College Rental Housing Subsidy Program. While faculty may not decide their own benefits, the FEC will make recommendations regarding these matters to the president and provost. Turning to another topic, Professor Polk asked about the progress of departments' efforts to develop anti-racism plans and how these plans will ultimately be disseminated. The provost said that many departments have now completed their plans. She noted that Pawan Dhingra, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty recently organized meetings with the chairs of STEM departments, social science departments, and humanities departments to discuss their anti-racism plans, during which some common themes emerged. In regard to sharing the final plans, the provost said that departments are being encouraged to post them on their web pages. The members felt that it would be informative to meet with Associate Provost and Associate Dean Dhingra to learn more about the anti-racism plans. With the meeting drawing to a close, Associate Provost Tobin agreed to create a list of other possible FEC agenda items for spring 2023 and to share the list with the members at an upcoming meeting of the committee.

The meeting concluded with Professor Mattiacci expressing appreciation to the president for hosting the community at gatherings at his home to celebrate the holidays. In turn, President Elliott, who said he had enjoyed the parties a great deal, thanked those who had made the events such a success.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty