

The eleventh meeting of the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) for the academic year 2022–2023 was called to order by Professor Call, chair of the committee, in the president’s office on Monday, February 13, at 4:00 p.m. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Hasan, Martini, Mattiacci, and Polk; President Elliott; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder. Consultant Susan Pierce attended the meeting via Zoom for the first hour, logging off at 5:00 p.m.

The majority of the meeting was devoted to a discussion about the ways in which the committee could move forward with the effort to consider faculty governance at the college, based on feedback that attendees had shared on this topic at the meetings that the FEC and S. Pierce had facilitated on January 30 and 31. The members agreed that, as an initial step, it would be helpful to the work ahead to gain a better understanding of the flow of work of committees. Toward this end, the members agreed to ask committee chairs whether their committee’s charge seems appropriate for the work being undertaken and what would be the ideal composition of their committee. The members wondered, for example, whether some committees might have more faculty serving on them than is necessary, and/or might be meeting more often than is needed. Professor Martini commented that the workload and level of accomplishments of committees is often determined by the chair, the aspirations and style of whom may vary greatly. The members also decided that finding a path forward to holding faculty meetings during the day should be a priority—as should considering changes to the scheduling of meetings, the approaches used for sharing and considering proposals brought to the faculty, and the ways in which meetings are conducted. In addition, the members concurred that consideration should be given to expanding the ways in which faculty are recognized for their work and special achievements, and developing a better sense of what is meant by the term “research college.” S. Pierce also found these issues to be of central importance.

Following the committee’s initial comments, S. Pierce was asked to offer her impressions of the meetings that had taken place during her time on campus. She noted that about one-third of the faculty had participated in the conversations over the course of the three days, during which she had met with some administrators as well. The consultant expressed her appreciation to the campus community for the warm welcome she had received; she had found the sessions to be very productive, she said. She also thanked Christine Overstreet, director of the fellowships, and Nancy Ratner, director of academic projects, for taking excellent notes at the meetings.

S. Pierce noted that the questions about service, citizenship, and governance that have come to the fore are complex and often intertwined. For example, on one hand, many faculty members at all ranks reported feeling overwhelmed by all that is required of them as professors; at the same time, a good number expressed a desire to be engaged in the governance of the college. Among them were some tenure-track faculty, who said that they would prefer not to be “protected” from service; those who have had opportunities to serve on committees often found the experience to be rewarding. S. Pierce said that she agrees with the notion that having tenure-track faculty serve on committees helps to educate them about the work of the college and helps them feel that they are citizens of the college from the outset. She also noted the suggestion that most committees have a member who is not yet tenured.

Continuing, the consultant noted that, based on what she has learned through her work with the college over several years now, she would recommend considering changes to the arc of a faculty member’s engagement with service over the course of a career at Amherst—using the idea of a tiered system of service as a guiding principle. In her view, rather than protecting new faculty from service or having them engage in the least important assignments, and then having many associate professors suddenly face a period punctuated by an overwhelming amount of service following their tenure sabbatical, there should be a service slope, so to speak—with a gradual ramping up. For example, in a faculty member’s first year, there should, perhaps, be no major committee work, but some service within the individual’s department(s). Over time, the faculty member might engage in more substantial service.

Turning to the topic of the time and place of faculty meetings, the consultant concurred that this issue should be on the top of the committee’s agenda, based on the interest expressed during the recent sessions.

She also agreed that reviewing the charges and composition of committees is important, suggesting that some might be able to function effectively with fewer faculty, requiring less faculty time.

In regard to recognizing faculty work and special achievements, S. Pierce commented that she has observed some tension surrounding this issue, which presents a challenge. There is clearly a feeling that service is not distributed equitably; the view was expressed that some faculty are asked to take on major service responsibilities on a frequent basis, while others do not do much service at all. In addition, while there is a desire among many to recognize significant service contributions and significant accomplishments, through approaches such as awarding merit pay, or simply more formal acknowledgement, there is also a reluctance to spend time documenting contributions in these areas, for example, through annual reports. Some members also noted that some tenure-track faculty do not have a clear sense of how service is “counted” when tenure decisions are made and noted that there should be more clarity on this point. S. Pierce commented that it is difficult to recognize service and significant accomplishments without knowing what an individual has actually done. In her conversations with faculty, there was agreement that service should not count as a “third leg” of the tenure stool, i.e., that it be given equivalent weight to teaching and scholarship, but that it should be considered.

Turning to the issue of defining more explicitly what it means for Amherst to be a research college, the consultant commented that the recent discussions revealed that there appeared to be a lack of clarity about the differing roles and responsibilities of faculty at liberal arts colleges, in comparison to those of faculty at R1 universities. S. Pierce suggested that it would be useful to ask a small number of peer institutions (both R1 schools and liberal arts colleges) to describe the expectations for faculty members at their schools.

The consultant next commented that the faculty who attended the meetings expressed great appreciation for the expertise that staff colleagues bring to their work with committees. For example, it was noted that C. Overstreet now drafts the letters of recommendation for the students whom the fellowships committee nominates for major fellowships, a task on which the faculty on the committee formerly spent a great deal of time. Committee members commented on the excellence of the letters and the skills that C. Overstreet brings to this work.

S. Pierce also noted that there were different views regarding the use of ad hoc committees. Some faculty found these bodies to be far more productive than standing committees, noting that ad hoc committees have specific charges and timelines. Others felt that it is not necessary to rely on ad hoc committees when standing committees could do the work that is assigned to these temporary bodies.

Continuing her remarks, S. Pierce commented on a number of other issues that faculty had raised. She said that some professors had noted the significant amount of time that they are spending with students who are less well prepared, leaving them less time for their scholarship and other teaching responsibilities. Some concerns were also expressed around the service burdens assumed by those with joint appointments. S. Pierce suggested that, rather than expecting those appointed to two departments to contribute equally to both in regard to service, as some said is true now, the committee might consider a recommendation that there be a primary department when it comes to the service expectation.

Discussion turned briefly to the topic of standards for promotion to the rank of full professor, with some members expressing the view that there is a lack of clarity about them. Provost Epstein noted that the Tenure and Promotion Committee plans to discuss this issue later this spring, after it completes its consideration of this year’s cases. This project intersects with the governance discussions about the most consequential use of faculty time, the provost commented. The goal, in her view, should be to ensure that faculty are able to remain engaged as scholar-teachers and citizens of the college, and that they have satisfying careers throughout their time at Amherst. For example, reducing the size of committees, when possible, would free up faculty time that could be spent instead on colleagues’ own scholarship and/or student-faculty research collaborations.

Professors Martini and Call commented that the pandemic (which resulted in significant demands in regard to remote teaching and often created barriers to making progress on research); the demographic shift in the faculty (which has resulted in increased departmental duties surrounding activities such as faculty

searches, faculty personnel processes, and mentoring tenure-track faculty); and time that is being spent on processes relating to Workday have resulted in a particularly difficult period when it comes to demands on faculty time.

Returning to the topic of gathering information from committees, Professor Mattiacci said that she is wary of asking already burdened faculty to provide reports about their views on their workload, composition, and charges. She volunteered to draft a simple form with a series of questions that could be answered by committee chairs, relatively quickly after consultation with their colleagues. The other members expressed support for this approach, and it was agreed that the form would be reviewed at the next meeting.

Professor Hasan said that the idea that tenure-track faculty don't want to be protected from service and may even want to spend more time on it, when they need to focus on their scholarly productivity prior to standing for tenure, seems inconsistent with his understanding of the concerns of some tenure-track faculty. S. Pierce said that there was no unanimity when it came to this issue, noting that it is a complicated question. Some tenure-track faculty are serving on committees already and don't feel that they are being protected, she noted. Others want to participate. Professor Polk and Professor Hasan wondered about the demographics of those who wish not to be protected from service. In their experience, faculty of color feel overburdened by the service that they are asked to do and would prefer to be protected from college-wide service during their tenure-track years, and to have what amounts to "invisible service" recognized. S. Pierce said that it is important to define what is being "counted" as service so that these important activities are recognized. She said that she is not suggesting that everyone serve on a college committee and noted that faculty of color and women are often less protected from service. In some discussions, some faculty commented on how overburdened they felt by departmental service. This concern seemed to vary among departments, S. Pierce said. Professor Martini commented that faculty who teach in departments with large enrollments may have less time for departmental responsibilities.

Conversation returned to the topic of the time of faculty meetings. Professor Polk, who expressed support for having faculty meetings during the day, commented on the dangerous weather conditions faced by those who left the last faculty meeting during a particularly icy evening. Provost Epstein noted that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), which the FEC charged with developing a proposal for a time during the day for the meetings, will likely propose that the meetings take place on Friday afternoons. Professor Hasan expressed concern about that idea, since those who travel for conferences and talks on Fridays would potentially miss faculty meetings. Provost Epstein responded that holding the meetings on any other day during the day would have a greater impact on the class schedule, which must be prioritized. Faculty meetings only take place two or three times a semester, on average, and it is not clear that faculty have conferences every Friday, she said. The members agreed that it would be helpful to shift away from holding every first and third Tuesday for faculty meetings, instead setting the specific dates for faculty meetings at the beginning of the year. This would allow faculty to plan their travel around meetings. It was noted that doing so would require the committee to plan the agendas well ahead of the meetings.

Continuing the discussion, Professor Call said that an idea had just occurred to him about an approach that might allow for a daytime faculty meeting that would not have a significant effect on the class schedule. He suggested that a day be chosen each semester—Wednesday, for example—and that faculty meetings be held, during different time slots, once per month on predetermined Wednesdays that would be announced at the start of the year. Using the spring semester as an example, February's Wednesday meeting would occur within the 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. time slot; March's meeting within the 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. slot, April's within the 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. slot, and May's meeting between the 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. slot. In this way, he said, the theory would be that each class that meets on a Wednesday would have its meeting time postponed once during the course of the semester. Then, an extra day would be added at the end of the semester to make up Wednesday classes that had been displaced for a faculty meeting. If the spring term starts on a Monday, and there is a full week of spring break and a two-day mini-break, then the classes would generally end on a Tuesday, so the added day could be an actual Wednesday with Wednesday classes, Professor Call explained.

The fall semester is more constrained, he noted, and thus more challenging (depending on how late Labor Day is), so if this idea has merit, the specifics for the fall term should be carefully analyzed to determine the best options.

Provost Epstein noted that adopting this plan for the next academic year would involve a minor change to the fall calendar that has already been approved. She also commented that some science labs (and studio classes) could overlap with more than one faculty meeting time slot. Professor Call said that this is an important question, and one that would need to be thought through with the departments involved. He also noted that, even though the time slots he had suggested in the example he had offered are two-hour slots, the actual faculty meeting would need to be scheduled for ninety to one hundred minutes, say, to allow time for colleagues to get to the meeting and to class (e.g., a 9:15 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. meeting within the 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. time slot).

At 5:00 p.m., the members thanked S. Pierce for offering her impressions and recommendations of the discussions that had taken place on January 30 and 31, and she logged off Zoom.

The FEC continued its discussion of faculty meetings. Professor Call said that, if the concept he had suggested is appealing to the members, he could check in with Professor Benedetto, chair of the CEP, and Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, to see what they think about this idea. The idea is rough right now, and details would need to be ironed out. The committee expressed admiration for Professor Call's proposal and expressed hope that the details could be worked out so as to implement this creative idea. Professor Call agreed to contact Professor Benedetto and J. Barba.

Conversation shifted to consideration of the question of moving the meetings back to Cole Assembly Room. It was noted that some faculty members have expressed a preference for returning to this space, including Professor Reyes, who made a formal proposal to this effect at the last faculty meeting. After some discussion, the committee agreed that, barring any change in the course of the pandemic, faculty meetings will return to the Red Room. The members recommended continuing to encourage colleagues to wear masks. The committee also agreed that the provost should continue to discuss with colleagues in Information technology (IT) mechanisms for voting electronically at meetings. Provost Epstein said that she and Associate Provost Tobin would do so, noting that, if faculty meetings take place during the day, it is her understanding that some IT staffing challenges that are preventing the use of clickers (one option for electronic voting) may be ameliorated. The committee also discussed some other possible innovations that might strengthen faculty meetings, including offering opportunities to do straw polls to get a sense of the faculty's views prior to discussions, and posting online in advance of faculty meetings motions and proposals on the agenda. The goal would be to elicit commentary and questions prior to faculty meetings.

The provost next informed the members that a student-editor from the *Amherst Student* has asked for excerpts from the minutes of the last faculty meeting that summarize the faculty discussion of the CEP's Latin honors proposal. The newspaper had not sent a reporter to the meeting, though this is permitted, the provost said. Faculty meeting minutes are not provided to students, she noted. After some discussion, the members agreed, given their concern about setting a precedent, that the minutes should not be provided. The committee decided that the provost could certainly summarize the conversation about the Latin honors proposal by meeting with the student or talking with the individual by phone.

The meeting ended with the president, under "topics of the day," noting that the board of trustees would be meeting from Thursday through Saturday of this week. This is the annual Instruction Weekend, during which the CEP and the FEC had met with the board. In addition, on Friday, a panel of faculty, joined by Sarah Barr, will discuss the ways in which they and their departments have incorporated community-based learning into their courses. The trustees will also be discussing the student center, most prominently financing options for the project, which will rely heavily on philanthropy. In addition, the board will be briefed on the process that has been put in place for developing the fiscal year 2024 budget, in anticipation of a board vote on the budget in May. The president concluded his remarks by informing the members that the search committee for the chief equity and inclusion officer, which will be co-chaired by Professor Pawan Dhingra,

associate provost and associate dean of the faculty, and Matt McGann, dean of admission and financial aid, is close to being finalized. He has also selected the search firm that will support the committee's work. It is WittKieffer, which has an excellent track record in this area.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty