

The fourth 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, October 17, 2022, at 4:00 p.m. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Coráñez Bolton, Mattiacci, Martini, and Polk; President Elliott; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder.

The meeting began with a brief conversation about the structure and modality of faculty meetings. ([See a request from Professor Fong that faculty members who wish to attend faculty meetings remotely be given the option to vote and to make comments using technology.](#)) Provost Epstein reiterated her view that the goal should be to have as many faculty members as possible attend faculty meetings in person. The members agreed, while also expressing support for offering faculty the option of voting remotely. The vote totals could be a combination of votes made via Zoom poll, and those made in person via paper ballot, for example. The committee decided to continue to discuss this issue, noting that it will be informative to see how the upcoming faculty meeting goes, and to learn more about the modalities in which colleagues attend. The members then turned briefly to a personnel matter.

Under “Topics of the Day,” President Elliott and Provost Epstein informed the members that they have heard from some faculty members who are frustrated by the current college masking policy in classroom spaces. In particular, some colleagues would like to be able to make masks optional in their classroom when only one or two students want masking to continue. Further, some colleagues would prefer that Amherst move to a mask-optional policy in all classrooms, with instructors retaining the right to require masks. The president and provost said that they are anticipating faculty comments on this topic at the October 18 faculty meeting, and will continue to gather input on this issue.

Speaking for themselves, the members favored retaining the current policy for now and considering any changes later in the semester. Professor Call commented that instructors are not necessarily aware of the health circumstances of all students in their classes, and he has sympathy for those who are at the greatest risk for complications, should they become infected with the virus. He is requiring masking in his classes, has explained his reasons for doing so to his students, and has found that they are understanding. Professor Martini noted that some tenure-track faculty, in particular, have expressed concern about enforcing a requirement that students be masked, as it is clear that some students do not comply. Professor Polk commented that he has not polled his students about masking in class, has continued to require masking, and has not received any pushback. While he would love to see his students’ faces, Professor Polk said that he feels that it is important, during this time, to be able to continue to have the protection that masks provide. Professors Coráñez Bolton and Mattiacci concurred with the view that it would be best to let the current masking policy stand for some time. President Elliott commented that he would like to see the college move away from COVID policies and toward practices, with faculty continuing to control the practices in their classrooms.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Mattiacci thanked President Elliott for providing the opportunity for faculty to meet with him during the town hall that he hosted on September 20 in a tent outside the Inn on Boltwood, and expressed appreciation to the provost for organizing a cocktail party in the garden of the president’s house, which took place on September 30. She also thanked President Elliott and Provost Epstein for engaging the committee in the very interesting conversation with consultant Susan Pierce about service, including having the members meet individually with S. Pierce.

Turning to another topic, Professor Martini suggested that the deadline to submit senior sabbatical fellowship proposals be changed from November to January, commenting that the proposals for tenure-track fellowships are now due in January, a positive development in her view. Provost Epstein responded that, normally, it is only a single year’s cohort of reappointment candidates (consisting of a small number of faculty) that apply for tenure-track fellowships, and that these assistant professors are preparing other materials for their reappointment dossiers during the fall term. Alternatively, she feels that it is helpful to have the deadline for leaves and the deadline for submission of senior

sabbatical fellowship proposals, which are required for all tenured faculty who are going on leave, remain November 1. Colleagues are welcome to request an extension for the senior sabbatical proposal, if they find it necessary, and she will grant it, the provost said.

At 4:20 p.m., Dean of Admission and Financial Aid Matt McGann joined the meeting to discuss the implications—depending on the decisions—of the two upcoming cases focusing on race-conscious admission that will come before the Supreme Court. Both cases will be heard on October 31, and it is expected that decisions will be released in June. Dean McGann commented on the college's engagement in the legal process surrounding support for race-conscious admission, noting the amicus brief on the side of Harvard and the University of North Carolina that Amherst initiated and coordinated, and that thirty-three liberal arts colleges have now signed on.

Dean McGann then offered a brief historical overview of Amherst's commitment to educational opportunity, praising the college's values, leadership within higher education, and accomplishment, in assembling and supporting a student body that is racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse. He noted that the most recent manifestation of this foundational commitment to access took place in 2021, when Amherst expanded financial aid significantly. At the same time, the college ended an admission preference that had been granted to the children of alumni. As a result of these steps, more low- and middle-income students are now benefiting from Amherst's loan-free financial aid program.

Continuing the discussion, Dean McGann emphasized that a ruling by the Supreme Court either to restrict or not allow holistic race-conscious admission programs would have a significant impact on Amherst's ability to continue to bring students from diverse backgrounds to the college. He briefly reviewed some of the history—beginning with the Supreme Court case of *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978)—of previous legal challenges to holistic race-conscious admission practices, and the impact of court decisions in those cases. Given the current makeup of the Supreme Court, Dean McGann said, there is a strong possibility that the court will overturn fifty years of precedent, ruling that the consideration of race in college admissions violates the law. Alternatively, the court may offer a narrower interpretation of what is allowable. As a result, Amherst—and its peers—have been preparing for the very significant challenges that such decisions would bring. These efforts have focused on considering ways in which the college could continue to prioritize bringing talented students from all backgrounds to Amherst, while complying with changes to the law regarding race-conscious admissions. Dean McGann noted that, since the 1990s, laws in some states, for example, Proposition 209 in California, have led to the elimination of affirmative action programs in numerous spheres within those states, including public education. He shared data with the members that indicate the significant impact that public colleges and universities have experienced as a result—with the number of students in some subgroups of students of color within their student bodies decreasing by as much as half or more. While some institutions have invested in robust race-neutral recruitment efforts to bring more students of color to their colleges and universities—efforts that are allowable under the law—as well as the introduction of additional new "race-neutral" admission approaches, little progress has been made in redressing the decrease in diversity of their student bodies. Dean McGann said that internal modeling has suggested that many of these approaches would be similarly ineffective at Amherst.

Noting that, if the court ends race-conscious admission, Amherst—like schools in California—would experience a significant decline in the number of Black, Latinx, and Native students at the college. If the court rules in June, the impact on the admission cycle that will begin this coming summer would be immediate, the dean noted. The college is taking this challenge extremely seriously, he said, and will continue to explore different strategies. Dean McGann then responded to the committee's questions.

Concluding the conversation, President Elliott emphasized the importance of discussing the possible implications of the Supreme Court's decisions with the Amherst community. The college will do everything it can to continue to bring students of diverse backgrounds here, while complying with the

law, he noted. The members, who were deeply saddened by the possible actions of the Supreme Court, thanked Dean McGann for his informative presentation and discussion. He left the meeting at 5:13 p.m.

In the time remaining, the members reviewed [a draft memorandum of understanding \(MOU\) that the provost's office has developed to clarify expectations \(e.g., surrounding publishing and teaching expectations, and service\) between departments and tenure-track and tenured faculty with joint appointments](#). Provost Epstein noted that the document was shared first with the chairs of departments with jointly appointed faculty, with jointly appointed faculty themselves, and most recently, at the meeting of chairs of academic departments and programs. The feedback has been positive, the provost noted. The committee also found these guidelines to be quite helpful and expressed support for moving forward with them. On a related note, Associate Provost Tobin noted that very few formal procedures regarding joint appointments surrounding reappointment, tenure, and promotion are included in the *Faculty Handbook*. There are long-standing practices when it comes to these processes, but perhaps it might be useful to add some handbook language, she suggested. The members agreed that the Tenure and Promotion Committee should decide whether to take up this issue; any motions that are developed would come to the Faculty Executive Committee and then be forwarded to the full faculty for a vote.

Professor Mattiacci left the meeting, and the members turned briefly to another proposal developed by the provost's office, this one focusing on mentoring guidelines—with the goal of creating greater equity across departments in regard to their practices. Tenure-track faculty members often express concerns about the degree to which mentoring varies among departments, Provost Epstein noted. She informed the members that the proposal had been received positively by the chairs of departments and programs, with some suggestions for slight adjustments. Professor Call stressed that, while he believes that the proposal is well-intentioned, and he knows that his senior colleagues wish to do everything they can to support their tenure-track faculty, he has serious concerns about the additional demands that the suggested protocols would place on tenured faculty in some departments. He can't imagine implementing these plans in his own department, due to the significant time commitment they would require of both tenured and untenured faculty. He and his colleagues are already working to capacity, he said. Professor Call commented that this is an example of the type of increasing service burdens that are being placed on departments, which he had noted during the discussion about service with S. Pierce.

Continuing the discussion, Provost Epstein responded that, while she appreciates that implementing this proposal may not be workable at this time in Professor Call's department, given the number of tenure-track faculty, she feels that it is important to address the concern that mentoring is not standardized at the college. If there is a shortage of mentors within a department, it is possible that a colleague in another department may be willing to become a mentor, she noted.

On a related note, Professor Coráñez Bolton raised some concern about making use of co-teaching as a mentoring tool, particularly at the beginning of a faculty member's career at Amherst. He said that, when he was told that he would be co-teaching with a senior colleague when he arrived at the college, it created a good deal of apprehension for him. He finds this model to be fraught at a structural level, as the untenured faculty member is co-teaching with someone who will ultimately be an evaluator and may not be given a choice in the matter. While he ended up having an amazing co-teaching experience, through which he learned a great deal, he feels that it would be helpful for departments to be provided with guidance surrounding the practice of requiring tenure-track faculty to co-teach with senior colleagues—particularly at a time when faculty members who are new to the college are adjusting to being at Amherst. In some departments, it was noted, this model might be necessary for curricular reasons, particularly in the sciences. Professor Martini, while agreeing that this may be the case in some departments, noted that some co-teaching models don't involve having both instructors present when teaching takes place. Instead, instructors teach different class sessions. This is a different kind of experience, which might be more comfortable for the untenured faculty

member, in her view. Professor Polk, concurring with Professor Coráñez Bolton's sentiments, noted that, in his experience, new faculty members can feel pressured when required to co-teach during a time when they may prefer to focus on gaining their footing as teachers in their own way. Provost Epstein said she would discuss this issue with the chairs of departments and programs and then share the chairs' feedback with the FEC.

Concluding the conversation and the meeting, Professor Martini noted that the possibility of tracking service in Workday came up at the chairs' meeting during which the mentoring proposal had been discussed. Possibly, this could address concerns that some service performed by faculty is not being recognized, she suggested. Provost Epstein said that such a system could not be implemented anytime soon. She noted that her office keeps some records of service, and that she requests that colleagues send her their CVs on a regular basis. Departmental, college, and professional service should be included in these documents.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty