

The fifth 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 24, 2022, at 4:00 p.m. Present, in addition to Professor Call, were Professors Mattiacci, Martini, and Polk; President Elliott; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Epstein; and Associate Provost Tobin, recorder. Professor Coráñez Bolton was absent.

The meeting began with a brief conversation about the faculty meeting that had taken place on October 18. Provost Epstein noted that about eighty faculty members and administrators watched the meeting remotely, and about another eighty attended in person. The members felt that the meeting went well, generally, while noting that it would be preferable for colleagues to attend in person. The provost suggested that shifting to a daytime faculty meeting, and in-person participation by everyone eligible to attend, would be optimal. The members concurred, while expressing the view that, if hybrid meetings are to continue, it would be best if a mechanism could be found to allow voting by those who are watching the meeting remotely. The possibility of having a chat function so that these colleagues could have voice, as well as vote, was also discussed—with some members worrying that those watching the meeting remotely cannot be full participants. Provost Epstein reminded the members that adding both functions in the near term would be challenging, given the available staffing and resources. If they wish to have voice and vote, faculty members should attend faculty meetings in person, in the provost’s view. Issues surrounding the quorum, depending on the modality of the faculty meeting, have also emerged as a result of holding meetings in a hybrid format, it was noted.

It was agreed that the FEC should charge the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) with developing a proposal for a weekly ninety-minute to two-hour block during the day that can be set aside for faculty meetings and community scheduling—for example, campus-wide meetings and department meetings. Further, the committee decided that, in developing its proposal, the CEP should be asked to consult with those who have the right and responsibility to attend faculty meetings and the director of institutional research and registrar services. As part of this work, the CEP, it was agreed, should also be asked to study Amherst’s weekly class schedule and to propose changes, if needed, to establish a block, and to consider the implications for athletics, the arts, and classroom availability of all proposed blocks. The provost suggested that the CEP should consider as a possible block Fridays, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. (with the meeting being held from 3:15 p.m. to 4:45 p.m., and the cushion allowing time for getting to the meeting). Provost Epstein commented that, while it is inevitable that some individuals will have conflicts with whatever block is chosen, Friday afternoons have worked well as a time for meetings with the chairs of academic departments and programs. The members agreed that the CEP should consider this block, as well as others that it determines to be viable options. Having a proposal by the end of the fall 2022 semester would be ideal.

On a related note, the members discussed potential venues for future faculty meetings. After considering Lipton Lecture Hall as an option, the members decided that Johnson Chapel—given its spaciousness—is preferable. The committee agreed that it would be helpful—for purposes of social distancing—to make sure that there are microphones on the upper level of the chapel, so attendees sitting there need not go down the stairs to speak. Associate Provost Tobin said that she would contact information technology staff about making sure that microphones are in place on the upper level.

Under “Questions from Committee Members,” Professor Martini commented that, when the Committee of Six was divided into two separate committees, the intention was that the FEC would have greater capacity to be proactive and to explore issues that it identifies, and would have more time to review related data, which could be shared with the faculty to enhance transparency. In this vein, Professor Martini requested that the committee be provided with an update on the implementation of the recommendations made in [the 2016 report on the Place of Athletics at Amherst \(the “Diver II report”\)](#) and [the 2018 report of the Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on Athletics](#), in particular progress that has been made in increasing recruitment efforts to bring more diverse student-athletes to the college.

Professor Martini said that Matt McGann, dean of admission and financial aid, had shown her data that demonstrate that progress has been made on this front. It was agreed that it would be helpful to have Dean McGann provide this information to the committee and to share these data with the faculty.

Conversation turned to a proposal that emerged during conversations that occurred in the post-tenure pathways program for faculty, which is administered by the provost's office, that committee meetings not be held during advising weeks, if possible. This would be a way to demonstrate the priority that is placed on advising and to give faculty members a breather while they meet with students, the provost explained. While this would not necessarily be possible for all committees, it would be helpful for those that are able not to meet. The members supported this idea as a useful recommendation, and it was agreed that the provost would announce it at the first faculty meeting of the fall and spring semesters. Another option would be to write to the chairs of committees to let them know.

Provost Epstein next raised the topic of the need for tenured faculty members to devise ways to solicit teaching evaluations from students, given that the current automated system of doing so is no longer viable. She commented that response rates using this approach have been poor, in any case. The provost suggested that the simplest solution might be for faculty to distribute evaluation forms and to have a student collect them at the end of class and bring them to the faculty member. Faculty members might also ask students to complete the common teaching evaluation form and email them to the academic department coordinator, so that identifying information is not available to the instructor. The members agreed that these seem like good solutions, at least for now.

Returning to [the Committee on Educational Policy's proposal to revise the Latin honors policy](#), the committee agreed that the proposal should be brought to the faculty for a vote at the next faculty meeting, which would be held on December 6. Following up on the discussion at the October 18 faculty meeting, Professor Polk said that he was taken aback and somewhat troubled that the CEP (represented by the chair) had confirmed that the proposed breadth requirement for honors students was envisioned as a de facto distribution requirement. He had not anticipated that this was the CEP's intention, particularly since it was not part of the proposal. While Professor Polk had questions about the effectiveness of the open curriculum before arriving at Amherst, he has come to appreciate the value students place upon it, he said. He wonders why the CEP is proposing to institute a breadth requirement only for honors students. Professor Call said that he thinks that the CEP was just being honest about what the likely effect of the proposed requirement would be for most students, and that the CEP feels that the modest breadth requirement reflects the value that the college places on the liberal arts mission. In his view, students who wish to pursue honors will fulfill the breadth requirement early on, and it is reasonable to impose an additional requirement on students who seek honors. It is the students' choice to seek this recognition, after all, Professor Call said. Professor Polk said that in his experience, many potential honors students do not tend to plan too far ahead, and he worries about those who would not plan sufficiently to fulfill the honors requirement being unable to have an honors experience as a result.

Professor Martini commented that she does not foresee that the breadth requirement will create a barrier for those seeking honors. At the same time, she feels that the bar is being set so low with the requirement, that it is almost meaningless. Provost Epstein commented that the breadth requirement could be a useful advising tool. Students, who might otherwise not take full advantage of the curriculum, may seek to fulfill the requirement early in the time at Amherst, enroll in courses that they might otherwise not take, and discover a new intellectual passion. She pointed out that some peer institutions have a similar breadth requirement for honors students. Professors Call and Martini once again expressed a preference for the system of having two parallel tracks for honors, one that is associated with research that is departmentally based, and a second that is college-wide, which is broader and based on a student's entire academic record.

Concluding the discussion, Professor Mattiacci said that she is concerned that the CEP said that transfer students' ability to fulfill the breadth requirement would be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Other members felt that most students would fulfill the requirement by the time they graduate now, with the exception perhaps of not taking a course in the arts. The committee asked the provost to convey the following questions to the CEP: Does the CEP want to make any refinements to the proposal based on feedback offered at the faculty meeting? Will the CEP offer clarification about transfer students and the breadth requirement? Will the CEP articulate further the argument for having a breadth requirement for honors students only, rather than for all students? Why is the proposal to have such a modest breadth requirement, if there is to be one? Did the committee consider eliminating Latin honors all together?

Jesse Barba, director of institutional research and registrar services, joined the meeting at 5:04 p.m. to discuss the questions that the FEC had posed earlier, with the goal of having a broad discussion about the growth of the college over the last thirty years, and what Amherst might anticipate, prefer, and plan for over the next twenty to thirty years. The committee's intention, the members noted, was to look at the size and composition (demographic and by rank) of the faculty, staff, administration, and student body in 1992, 2002, 2012 and 2022 (J. Barba ended up providing [data from 2005 to 2021](#)). For each year chosen, the request was to compile the following information: the total number of faculty FTE, broken down by gender; the number of tenure lines, broken down by rank (for the total and within rank, broken down by gender and race); the number of faculty in administrative positions, full-time and half-time, and the number of course releases; the number of lecturers, senior lecturers, resident artists, senior resident artists, and writers in residence, broken down by gender and race; the number of visiting faculty, broken down by gender and race; the number of postdocs and fellows, broken down by gender and race; the total number of staff FTE, broken down by gender and race; the number of instructional staff who work directly with students or with faculty in courses in the Writing Center, the Moss Quantitative Center, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the library, the Mead Art Museum, and IT, and other areas in which staff may "teach" and work with students; the number of senior staff, broken down by gender and race; the growth in the size of the student body, broken down by gender, race, geography (especially international numbers), first generation, and lower income, percentage on financial aid, and average financial aid award in dollars and as a percentage of the annual fee (with years when significant policies were enacted (e.g., no loans in aid packages etc.) noted; and how the percentage of the class accepted through early decision has changed over these years.

The members began the discussion by thanking J. Barba for assembling the data that he had shared with them. The members were struck by the growth of the college in many realms over the period under discussion and noted, in particular, the progress that has been made on diversifying the faculty (including closing the gender gap between male and female professors over the past decade and increasing the number of faculty of color), and the expansion of the number of assistant professors and absolute number of assistant professors at present. In response to some of the members questions, J. Barba explained the way in which the faculty FTE count is calculated; he discussed the way in which joint appointments and faculty on phased retirement are factored into the count, and the fact that FTEs are allocated to departments only, and not programs (data relating to programs remain largely untracked, he said). He also noted that the number of international faculty is deceptively low because immigration status is the defining factor. Once faculty from other countries receive tenure, they often get permanent residency via a "Green Card," or become citizens of the U.S. It was noted that the make-up of the faculty has shifted more quickly than at peer institutions, with many faculty retiring during the period under discussion, so that the faculty now includes more professors who are at earlier career stages. This is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration when comparing average salaries by rank with peer schools. In regard to the student body, J. Barba also commented that students of color have comprised the majority of Amherst's student body since 2012. J. Barba also discussed shifts in

enrollment that have occurred in recent years due to COVID-19, including the impact on the number of students who study away in the fall and spring.

Concluding, J. Barba informed the members that he will be assembling data on lecturers and visitors and will seek information about staff from human resources, which is responsible for tracking this information. He noted the difficulty of comparing the number of staff among peer institutions, due to differences in the ways in which staff are defined. The members thanked J. Barba once again at the conclusion of the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Epstein
Provost and Dean of the Faculty