

Chancellor's Q&A On the Commission Report and the Campus Response

Why appoint the Commission in the first place?

The campus has a long history of constructive engagement on issues of race, class, and gender and over the years it has demonstrated remarkable success in inventing nationally significant programs. At the same time, in recent years, a constant current of controversy and unhappiness has characterized the operation of some of the historically effective organizations. These issues, combined with a troubling decline in the representation of minority students on campus and continuing difficulty in recruiting and retaining minority faculty and staff, prompted the creation of the Commission.

What did the Commission accomplish?

Among many things, the Commission collected in one place a comprehensive review of all the issues articulated by a wide range of interested people and groups in the extended campus community. It reviewed this extensive testimony, and made a series of findings and recommendations it believed helpful in orienting the campus' efforts to improve. While not every constituency on campus will agree with every finding or recommendation, the Commission's great contribution has been to focus our attention on what we need to address and to offer some suggestions about how to address these issues.

Will the administration implement all of the Commission's Recommendations?

The campus can implement some of the recommendations immediately, some it can begin a process to address, and others are not practical to address at this time. In the questions and answers below some of these issues appear. As the Commission noted, the resources available to this campus do not permit us to do everything we would like to do.

What process did the administration follow in developing the first draft proposal in response to the Commission's recommendations?

The various offices of key significance to the issues addressed by the Commission have been engaged in a long-standing discussion about how to respond to the problems and opportunities that fell within the Commission's scope of inquiry. As a result, many of the findings of the Commission were well known to everyone on campus with an interest in these issues, and Academic and Student Affairs offices have been reviewing their programs over the course of the semester in anticipation of the need to respond quickly to whatever recommendations the Commission might provide. When the campus received the Commission's report with its recommendations, these two offices went immediately to work to construct a first draft response for posting on the campus diversity website for review and comment by the entire UMass Amherst community. Not surprisingly, many comments and suggestions about the draft proposal have come back, and based on those comments the campus will revise the proposal, explain what may not have been clearly articulated, and post a second draft proposal on the diversity website. The process of consultation, review, and revision, as is appropriate for important and complex issues that affect everyone, ensures that the campus receives and considers all perspectives and information in an orderly and effective manner and then takes action.

Why did the first draft proposal not include the creation of a Vice Chancellor for Diversity as recommended by the Commission?

This recommendation at first look is attractive. It would allow the campus to consolidate everything that affects programs of diversity under one executive leadership. However, even if this were desirable, the segregation of diversity-oriented activities into one office relieves all other parts of the institution of responsibility for these issues. We do not believe that this is an effective way to achieve the results recommended by the Commission. In practice, the creation of such a position does not advance the objectives outlined in the Commission's report or reflect the campus' goal. The goal of the campus is to provide a supportive and inclusive environment that enhances the academic success of all students, regardless of race, class, gender, or other characteristics. A Vice Chancellor for Diversity would need to have a significant portfolio of responsibility and the authority to manage the budget necessary to implement that responsibility. Without a portfolio or budget, such a position would simply serve as an empty symbolic gesture. The creation of a Vice Chancellor for Diversity with the authority and responsibility necessary would require a reorganization of the institution to move some significant portion of the funding and responsibility for academic affairs especially and some portions of student affairs into the office of the new Vice Chancellor.

If there is no Vice Chancellor for Diversity, who will be responsible for diversity on the campus?

The campus commitment to diversity, as outlined in the Commission report, affects almost every area of activity. Whether in academic affairs, student affairs, administration and finance including physical plant, development, athletics, recreation, or student government activities, diversity issues are fundamentally important for the campus. The second draft of the proposal will assign responsibility for the successful implementation of our diversity goals throughout the institution. While alternative organizational models exist that separate out diversity issues into enclaves and special units, we believe that unless everyone accepts their responsibility and unless we have clear lines of authority and responsibility, we cannot insist on accountability for the diversity goals we seek. For this reason, the responsibility for diversity in academic affairs rests with the Provost and the deans and departments. The responsibility for diversity in student affairs rests with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and the staff of that office. Similarly, responsibility for the diversity agenda of the Student Government Association resides with the elected officers and representatives of the SGA. However, each unit and the campus need to measure individual responsibilities against clear objectives and action plans that have identifiable outcomes. It is also fundamentally important to reinforce the message that insofar as students are concerned, we seek the optimal methods for enhancing student academic success. The second draft proposal will outline how we will proceed to identify those objectives, how we will develop those plans, and how we will identify the measurable outcomes. It then becomes the Chancellor's responsibility to see that these administrative and academic organizations meet their objectives.

What independent review will exist to assist the Chancellor in fulfilling the responsibility to monitor the campus units' success in fulfilling the goals established?

The first draft proposal did not effectively address this issue. The second draft proposal will include the establishment of a process for reviewing the campus' progress on these issues. That process will include the appointment of an ad hoc review committee to advise the Chancellor on the progress made in all units. This group will include representatives from various campus constituencies: faculty, staff, students, and community. The Chancellor will appoint individuals to this ad hoc committee annually, including some who served on the Commission, some who represent different areas of the campus mission, and some who have a historical perspective on the campus' efforts in this area. No senior administrative officers or others with major budgetary authority over programs and activities reviewed will serve on this ad hoc Chancellor's review committee. The ad hoc committee will meet with the Chancellor soon after the close of the fiscal year to review the campus's progress in achieving its goals.

Why is the conversation about these issues so intense and sometimes emotional?

Issues of race, class, and gender in America have been and continue to be very difficult to discuss and often evoke strong emotions. They affect all of us in profound and frequently intensely personal ways. It is difficult to discuss and engage on these questions without generating strong, sincere, and profound emotions that can on occasion provoke uncomfortable conversations. Whatever the emotion and however it is displayed, the core issues and problems are of long standing on this and every other major university campus in America. The issues are particularly difficult to resolve because the campus does not exist in isolation from the many communities that support it. Whatever unresolved problems exist in our society appear repeatedly on our campus. The most effective approach to these issues is to listen carefully to identify the issues and problems that underlie expressions of pain and anxiety and disappointment, however expressed. While the campus seeks to carry out these conversations in a careful manner that respects everyone and their right to be heard, from time to time individuals may exercise their freedom of expression in less graceful ways. That is their right. However, the work we have to do is programmatic, organizational, and purposeful. If we do it well, our campus will improve.

Why does the campus first draft proposal remove all authority and programs from the Student Government Association?

The draft plan did not fully explain the relationship to the Student Government Association. The Student Government Association and other student organizations do not have the authority to hire or supervise the university employees who work with various student groups and activities. All of the groups that have permanent university employees currently funded by Student Government have been, and will continue to be, organized as part of the Office of Student Affairs. Permanent employees report to that office and are supervised and managed according to university procedures, currently through the Student Activities Center.

However, the Student Government Association has at various times in the past agreed to provide the funding for the operation of many programs and activities related to student affairs. In some cases, this generous allocation of Student Government Association funds to campus administrative and student affairs functions reduced Student Government's ability to fund other student groups and activities that request financing every year. On occasion, clear lines of communication and accountability proved difficult to establish. In the draft proposal, the campus assumes the financial obligation for core activities that link student affairs and academic affairs functions directly related to diversity issues, returning about \$200,000 of SGA funds to the Student Government for the SGA to spend as appropriate. If SGA chooses, of course, it may support additional programming in areas related to the campus diversity agenda, but such a decision is entirely within SGA's authority. Other agencies and activities less central to the campus academic and administrative responsibilities continue with their funding and activities and the university personnel funded within these agencies continue to report to Student Affairs as before. SGA will of course continue to have the authority to review expenditures from SGA funds and determine future expenditures each year.

What in your view are the most important elements in the draft plan?

The key to our success in promoting an inclusive and diverse campus is the engagement of faculty, staff, and students in this effort at all levels. We have already had considerable success in driving the issues of Community, Diversity, and Social Justice into the core operations of all departments, programs, and offices on campus through the CDSJ initiative begun by Chancellor Scott that continues strongly supported today. The key to CDSJ's success has been its data driven, local focus on important issues in every unit on campus. This program has found strong commitment over the years and its activities continue. The first draft proposal contains an effort to enhance the academic engagement in recruiting a diverse faculty, in reviewing and improving the curricular structure, and in enhancing academic advising. The first draft proposal also contains an effort to enhance the student affairs engagement in recruiting a diverse student body, in providing stronger support for the many programs that address the particular needs of specific student groups on campus, and in improving our management of the linkage between admissions, financial aid, and academic advising. The second draft proposal will make clear that the primary goal of these efforts is to ensure the academic success of our students, to link the student affairs experience and the academic affairs activities more closely, and to recruit and retain a more diverse student body, faculty, and staff.

Why should anyone believe this plan will improve things?

The first draft proposal and the second draft as well are not about belief although they speak to our belief in and our commitment to constructing a diverse and inclusive campus. These draft proposals, following one of the key cautions of the Commission's report, are very specific about who will do what, call for the development of clear objectives and measurable outcomes, and insist on accountability. We are interested in measurable performance. We are interested in improvement that we can measure. We are interested in creating an organization and a structure that can deliver the results we want regardless of the personalities of particular individuals. We will all be responsible for its success, and in addition to the measurable goals we set for ourselves, we will

review our progress with the Chancellor's ad hoc review committee to ensure that we are on track.

Isn't all this focus on race, class, and gender against the law?

The courts have been reviewing programs of this kind, especially at universities and colleges, to ensure that they do not implement activities deemed to violate federal law. In the case of the Commission Report, the campus received clear communications from a public interest law group indicating that in their view many of the recommendations violated federal laws and court decisions. They also warned that if we proceeded with implementing the report as written they would take a variety of legal actions. This response came as no surprise. However, we have no interest in a protracted legal battle over any part of our plans to implement the Commission's recommendations, and so we have expressed our programs and activities in language and with measures that our legal counsel and we expect can pass legal review.

We may not, for example, speak about quotas for specific groups in defining our goals for admission of students or for the hiring of faculty and staff. We may speak about the recruitment of individuals from groups we have not been successful in reaching in the past and that have significant numbers of qualified applicants. We may not set aside a pool of funds for the hiring of specific minority or other groups of individuals for our faculty or staff, nor can we set aside funds to support explicitly defined students from particular groups of people. We may however recruit our students, faculty, and staff ever more aggressively from all segments of the population, capturing candidates who we might previously have ignored. We can measure our success in achieving a diverse population throughout campus, but we may not dedicate specific resources to specific groups to the exclusion of other groups.

What has been the process of consultation for the proposal and the final plan?

The extensive and public process of consultation actually has two phases.

The first phase was the Commission process itself. Before putting together a proposal to address what the campus clearly identified as a major issue of ineffectiveness in its diversity efforts, the Chancellor, Provost, and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs asked the Commission to convene and conduct a complete review of the campus' diversity issues. We asked them to listen to every group that had testimony to provide, receive many written commentaries, call on experts in the community and on campus for information and background on whatever issues they believed important, and prepare a report with recommendations to help guide the development of a proposal to address the major campus issues related to diversity. The Commission had complete autonomy, the administration did not participate in their deliberations, nor did the Commission consult with the Chancellor before issuing its report. Those of us who have read the Commission's report and the various materials included with it stand in awe at the amount of work, careful consideration, and thoughtful deliberation that went into its preparation. This process over several months defined the first phase of consultation.

The second phase of consultation followed the commitment the Chancellor, the Provost, and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs gave the Commission at the outset. We agreed to follow up on the Commission's recommendations quickly with specific plans and actions to address the recommendations and findings. While the Commission and we recognized at our initial meeting that we might not be able to implement all of the Commission's recommendations, either for budget or other reasons, we made the commitment to provide a clear, direct, and specific response quickly.

The first draft proposal, posted on the diversity website for public review, fulfilled this obligation, and its publication began the second phase of consultation. We provided a period for written responses to the proposal, suggestions for improvement, and other comment. During this period, it became clear that many members of our campus constituency wanted more time to comment on the first draft proposal. In response, the campus extended the comment period, agreed to prepare a question and answer document to address various issues, and finally to post a second, revised draft incorporating some of the comments and suggestions to the first draft. The campus also agreed to post an alternative proposal signed by the presidents of the Student Government Association and the Graduate Student Senate. The present document represents the Q&A mentioned above and offers a commentary on many of the issues raised. We will review all additional comments, alternative proposals, and other materials, issue the second draft proposal, and allow time for comment. Once the last comment period concludes, we will further revise as needed, and then issue the campus plan and begin implementation. The schedules, press releases, alternative plan, Q&A, and draft plans have all appeared or will appear on the campus diversity website as outlined in the press releases.

What is the Diversity Tax, why do we need it, who pays it, and where does the money come from?

The implementation of the final plan, once revised and adjusted to respond to the suggestions we will receive, will require additional campus investment. This investment will pay for a number of things, but most fall into several major categories. Based on the first draft proposal we can estimate these costs.

The first is the investment that relieves the Student Government Association of the obligation to support core administrative functions of the Student Affairs office. This we estimate to be about \$200,000. The second is the investment in additional support for student diversity efforts through Student Affairs, primarily for enhanced programming and for increasing the senior staff to help coordinate, better organize, and more effectively manage the many programs that support different student groups. In addition, within Student Affairs, increased investment in more effective recruiting will be required. These expenses will total approximately \$240,000.

Within Academic Affairs, additional expense will be required to support enhanced academic advising and to ensure that the reorganization of academic advising functions begun some years ago is completed and made effective. Funds will be required to manage and support the intensive recruitment of academic faculty and staff from groups

where the institution has been less effective in the past. The academic affairs additional expenses will be about \$300,000.

In Administration and Finance, the office of Workplace Training that helps managers operate more effectively, especially in dealing with diverse populations, will add resources focused on diversity training for managers at a cost of about \$60,000.

These initiatives along with some less significant expenses related to improving the physical facilities used in supporting diversity efforts and programs, will require about \$800,000. Note that this amount does not include the extensive diversity efforts that already exist in many colleges, the continuing commitment to the CDSJ initiative, and many other programs and activities focused on various aspects of diversity funded either by the campus or through external grants.

The campus does not have \$800,000 in new unrestricted funding to allocate to this or any other project. The Diversity Tax reallocates \$800,000 from existing academic, administrative, and other units to support the programs described in the plan. The reason for the explicit Diversity Tax is to recognize that the success of these programs is everyone's responsibility and that the investment of resources is the commitment we all make to achieve a more diverse campus. While some have objected to the notion of a tax, we have chosen this word to describe the reallocation because, like the taxes we all pay for other important services, the Diversity Tax reflects the reallocation of funds to permit us all to invest in the programs and activities that will enhance this campus.

Why not move the Police Department from Student Affairs to Administration and Finance as recommended by the Commission Report?

Campus police departments report to student affairs or administrative affairs offices at different campuses. There is some significant sentiment that this public safety function is really an administrative function rather than a student affairs function. Others think that if the police report to student affairs the particular issues that are critical to students in their interaction with public safety officials may receive more attention. We looked closely at transferring the public safety function to Administration and Finance, and Student Affairs was agreeable to this change. However, currently Administration and Finance is seriously understaffed at the supervisory level (and elsewhere), is just launching a major series of very complex capital projects, and does not have the resources to take on an additional supervisory responsibility. For the time being, we have postponed any changes in the reporting relationship for public safety, but we will revisit this issue in a year or so when Administration and Finance has filled some of its current vacancies.

Why did the proposal not move Admissions from Student Affairs to Academic Affairs?

While this notion has much to recommend it, providing a close linkage between the admitted students and the colleges and academic programs that interest them, it is less effective in managing the process of recruitment, admission, and financial aid. These three functions focus on the identification of potential students, the recruitment of those

students while they are in high school, the encouragement of potential students to apply, the selection of students for admission using need-blind consistent academic criteria, the packaging of financial aid, and the eventual introduction of new students to the campus. This process requires close coordination between the various offices in Student Affairs, but it also requires close coordination with the various offices in Academic Affairs. After a careful review with the Provost, the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and the Chancellor, we determined that we will be more effective in enhancing the diversity of our student population by continuing to develop our capabilities in Admissions within Student Affairs, but that we will need better coordination with Academic Affairs to achieve the success we seek. The first draft proposal reflects this organizational decision and the second draft proposal will as well.