

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission on Campus Diversity, appointed and charged by Chancellor John V. Lombardi, has studied, over a four-month period (November 2004–February 2005), the nature, history and current challenges of issues pertaining to racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. In the process, the Commission studied many previous reports on these subjects (see Appendix 2) and held interviews and received testimony from almost 100 students, faculty, administrators, staff, alumni and others in the university community (see Appendix 3).

The University of Massachusetts Amherst was a national leader for enhancing student, faculty and administrative diversity in the 1960's and 1970's. However, in more recent years, the Amherst campus has experienced several negative (and sometimes violent) incidents that involved matters of race and there has been a noticeable reduction in the presence of African American and other students and faculty of color on campus (see Appendices 4, 5 and 7).

While quantitative data on diversity and inclusion are summarized in appendices to this report, these data do not reveal the climate of distrust that exists on the Amherst campus, nor the depth of the pain and passion voiced by many students, faculty, staff and alumni when they speak of their experiences as racially or ethnically isolated members of the campus community. One graduate identified himself as a “once proud alumnus” of the Amherst campus; several current undergraduates noted that they would urge their younger siblings not to attend the University of Massachusetts Amherst; and some faculty members spoke to the “sea of whiteness” that surrounds and the bigotry and paternalism that confront minority undergraduates on the Amherst campus. While many students, faculty, staff and alumni reveal a deep commitment and affection for the institution, the campus climate is perceived by too many students as such that their sense of educational opportunities and the possibilities available to them are diminished by the experiences and the anguish they describe. These voices demand further contextualization.

UMass Amherst is not alone in facing issues of diversity and inclusion, and these issues are central for many if not all institutions of higher learning. However, the history and the demographics of the Commonwealth contribute to the campus's current situation. Many students come to the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus from racially isolated, homogenous communities in Massachusetts, where they do not have opportunities to interact with people of other races and ethnicities, or to learn the skills needed to reach across cultures. It is essential that UMass Amherst fully embrace its responsibility to educate students on matters of diversity, to help give them the experiences and the preparation they need to welcome and appreciate difference and to live and work productively in a diverse society. Yet it is clear that UMass Amherst through the years has deeded over to students some of these essential responsibilities—responsibilities that need to be assumed by the Amherst campus as a part of its core mission.

At the same time, several current positive aspects and promising practices of the Amherst campus also must be seen as part of the picture. The Commission applauds the firm commitment of the Chancellor and the Provost to support an enhanced diversity program. The Commission also notes the positive work being done by units across UMass Amherst, such as the Community, Diversity and Social Justice Initiative (CDSJ).

One further piece of the puzzle that comprises the current context for the University of Massachusetts Amherst is the challenge posed by recent rounds of brutal budget cuts. A reduction of 25% over three years cannot fail to impact the campus severely. *However, the Commission emphasizes that diversity and inclusion are so essential to the core mission of the Amherst campus that it must find or raise the financial resources necessary to support its efforts on matters related to diversity.* This commitment to diversity and inclusion can be seen as an opportunity for fundraising. It must be seen further as an essential part of what is necessary for the University of Massachusetts Amherst to achieve elite national status and standing.

Based on the extensive examination described within this report, the Commission has identified several factors that militate against the realization of a fully inclusive campus

of diverse racial and ethnic groups despite the aforementioned presence of positive energy and efforts among several individuals and entities at the Amherst campus, among them the CDSJ. As described within this report, the Commission has noted the following serious problems at the University of Massachusetts Amherst:

- Lack of consistent and unequivocal commitment to diversity, inclusion and social justice in the mission statement, practices and structures. There is an additional lack of consistent clarity concerning Amherst campus expectations, philosophies and core values with respect to diversity and inclusion. As a result many feelings of mistrust, disappointment and anger towards some aspects of the Amherst campus administration are expressed by some students, staff, faculty and others, regarding the campus's treatment of members of underrepresented minority groups. Some of the students' negative feelings are associated with their conviction that their voices are disrespected, not taken seriously, and in some cases ignored, and in their belief that the authority of the Student Government to advocate on behalf of diversity and inclusion has been undermined.
- A crisis management, rather than planning-centered, approach to addressing issues of diversity and inclusion, resulting in a cyclical waxing and waning of campus initiatives that seem to respond to the need to reduce the "heat" of overt manifestations of racism, ethnocentrism or violence when they occur rather than an approach based on careful planning and assessment in conformity with good practice in higher education.
- Lack of centralized coordination of diversity activities and no senior level individual designated to "champion" and advocate on behalf of inclusion and diversity issues at all levels of university life. In some instances, this has created a duplication of effort with diminished impact.
- Absence of an overall undergraduate and graduate strategic enrollment management plan exacerbated by the lack of a professionally qualified and seasoned director of admissions (for the past five or six years) have left unaddressed a serious pattern of declining enrollment of minority students

on the Amherst campus (see Appendices 4 and 5), and have contributed towards missed opportunities to enhance equity in recruitment, applications, admissions, financial support, retention and graduation of students from underrepresented minority groups in all academic units, including the Commonwealth College (Honors College) (see Appendix 6). The absence of an organizational structure that strictly aligns financial aid and admissions further contributes to these missed opportunities to increase minority student enrollment.

- Uneven and oftentimes deficient academic advising of students generally and especially African, Latino, Asian and Native American (ALANA) students.
- Overextended goals for the ALANA support programs with respect to their original intent to serve as transitional entities to advance racial/ethnic equity and to provide a welcoming environment for ALANA students vs. their evolution to providing some essential services for students that are inadequately provided by the Amherst campus such as advising, recruitment and some academic services in addition to their social and cultural activities and advocacy for students. Moreover, there seems to be a pattern of racial/ethnic balkanization that often results in a disconnectivity of students of color from the general campus community, as well as within ALANA student communities.
- Serious declines in faculty, staff and administrators of color in recent years in the face of almost universal expressions of needs to increase faculty and leadership diversity (see Appendix 7).
- Absence of benchmarks, targets, assessment tools, accountability standards and rewards to govern the expectations of deans, department heads, faculty, staff and others in achieving institutional and school/college inclusion and diversity goals.
- The presence of other “isms” beyond racism that, while beyond the charge to the Commission, deserve attention from the Amherst campus (e.g.,

issues revolving around such matters as socioeconomic class, disability, language preference, sexual orientation, etc.).

- Insufficient support and unevenness in the general education courses and discipline-specific courses offered and required of UMass Amherst undergraduates designed to enhance their knowledge of and competence in diversity issues. No apparent effort to include such courses on a consistent basis within graduate programs. Insufficient support for the curricular and pedagogical requirements to adequately meet diversity and inclusion goals in academic areas.
- Inadequate opportunities to enhance the ability of staff, administrators and others to meet the unique challenges involved in addressing the unique needs of underrepresented minority students.
- Severe cuts in the UMass Amherst's budget seem to have compromised its ability to provide adequate staffing and other resources to support essential services and programs to enhance diversity and inclusion.

In response to these observations, the Commission is making a number of recommendations to address these—and other—issues. The major recommendations are summarized below and elaborated in subsequent sections:

- Appoint a senior level administrator with adequate staffing, budget and resources to report directly to the Chancellor to review and coordinate all diversity and inclusion activities at the Amherst campus. The appointee should develop programs and plans, in cooperation with the Provost and other senior administrators, which would include incentives and rewards for individuals and units that initiate special efforts to achieve and implement university diversity and inclusion goals and policies. The appointee should also participate in raising funds to implement intensive and aggressive “pipeline” programs that reach out to high school and community colleges with the goal of increasing enrollment of undergraduate students of color on the Amherst campus. As a standing member of the Chancellor's cabinet, the appointee should advocate for diversity and

inclusion policies, goals and practices campus wide, and make an annual report to the Chancellor and the campus community on progress towards achieving the campus's policies, goals and practices. The appointee shall not substitute for the expectation that other faculty and administrators will pursue efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion.

- Establish an advisory council for the proposed senior diversity official consisting of individuals from a cross-section of the university community to assist in planning and assessing diversity and inclusion goals, policies and programs. In developing the advisory council on diversity, the University of Massachusetts Amherst would be well served to consult with other existing groups on campus, such as the CDSJ Initiative.
- Re-structure the institution's administrative organization to enhance the achievement of inclusion and diversity goals, including the assignment of increased responsibility and oversight by the Office of the Provost in pursuing such goals, particularly those that relate directly to academic functions such as student advising.
- Establish a planning and assessment process to govern undergraduate and graduate enrollment management with particular attention to reversing the current decline of minority students on the Amherst campus through intensified efforts to recruit, enroll, retain and graduate students from underrepresented groups. Establish an organizational structure that strictly aligns financial aid and admissions.
- Re-structure and improve the institution's academic advising services such that these advising services become more available and effective for all students and sensitive to the unique issues and concerns of students of color. At the discretion of the Provost, add advisors to pre-major advising services and make sure that all new and current advisors are culturally competent to advise ALANA students. The advising office should liaise with the ALANA support programs. In addition, and at the discretion of the Provost, add advisors to the offices of the college deans where there is critical need, and make sure that all new and current advisors are culturally competent to advise ALANA students. The college advisors should

liaise with the support programs. Existing programs such as those in the School of Management and the College of Engineering should be considered as models for other schools and colleges in their advising efforts.

- Re-define and re-structure ALANA support programs, including ALANA Honors. Under this re-structuring, these programs should be supported in terms of budget and FTEs, and should provide the following services: mentoring and advocacy for students with such offices as the bursar, financial aid, career services, housing, public safety and counseling.
- Re-structured support programs should work, in strict cooperation and collaboration with respective academic and student affairs units, to supplement and enhance, as appropriate, the services of the following existing programs: tutoring, new student orientation, recruitment and outreach. It is the expectation of the Commission that there be timely issuance of reports from academic units to the support programs to aid their retention efforts, as appropriate and determined in consultation with academic units.
- Launch a systematic and coherent drive to reverse the current decline of faculty and administrators of color on the Amherst campus by intensifying efforts to recruit, hire, promote and tenure faculty members from these groups, with increased accountability for deans, department heads and other academic leaders to achieve targeted goals.
- Increase accountability and incentives for deaneries, departments and administrators across executive areas to establish and implement benchmarks, targets and assessment procedures to govern diversity efforts within their units.
- Review, assess and strengthen, as needed, the general education requirement and courses within majors for undergraduate and graduate students to enhance their knowledge of and competence in diversity and inclusion topics.
- Review, assess and strengthen, as needed, opportunities for staff, administrators and faculty to acquire the sensitivities and competencies required to meet the unique needs of racially and ethnically diverse students.

- Require all members of the Amherst campus's leadership community to develop plans to intensify and assess efforts to achieve an improved climate for enhancing diversity and inclusion within their areas of responsibility.
- In full recognition of the current serious budgetary challenges, UMass Amherst must find or raise the funds necessary to provide the structures, educational experiences and infrastructures required to address the academic and campus climate issues contained within this report.
- Establish a regularized and annual process for assessing the progress toward the achievement of the institution's inclusion and diversity goals by a body similar to the current Commission with the expectation that an annual written report and recommendations emanating from such a process are provided directly to the Chancellor.
- Student voices should be valued and the integrity of student government and its agencies respected in the pursuit of diversity and inclusion goals.

In aggregate, the Commission wants the readers of this report to understand that the overriding goal of our exhortations and recommendations is to help UMass Amherst enable students of color *and indeed all students* to be comfortable and to achieve within the rich context of culturally diverse, effective and socially just learning communities appropriate to what will be required for them to live and work successfully in the 21st century.