Good morning! Today’s honorees showcase the excellence of this university and it is a pleasure to acknowledge and celebrate their stellar accomplishments. I thank them – and all of our faculty – for their contributions. I am exceedingly proud of the work you all do.

As I enter my fourth year as chancellor of this great university, I want to talk to you today about my vision for our campus. We’ve made great strides over the past few years in quality, rankings, reputation and prestige. From the high academic quality of our students, to our ever expanding research profile, to the exceptional accomplishments of our faculty as witnessed today, the flagship campus has reached heights that few could have imagined just a few short years ago.

But while we should all be proud of what we’ve accomplished together, we are not done. We have a special role in the life of the Commonwealth. Massachusetts has staked its future on innovation, and on the leadership in education that fuels innovation. As a Boston Globe columnist recently reminded us, Horace Mann, Massachusetts’s first Secretary of Education and the founder of public education in America said more than 150 years ago, “Having no other mines to work, Massachusetts has mined into the human intellect; and from its limitless resources, she has won more sustaining and enduring prosperity and happiness than if she had been founded on a stratification of silver and gold, reaching deeper down than geology has yet penetrated.”

So Massachusetts rises or falls on the strength of its educational enterprise. And it has much to be proud of. We are America’s “education state,” the undisputed national leader in K through 12 education, and a world leader in private higher education. But the promise of even the finest public high schools falls short unless their graduates have comparable opportunities for a distinctive college education. The unrivaled constellation of private colleges and universities in the state is a national treasure, but by design, not always focused on the needs of citizens here at home. There are many universities in Massachusetts, but only one university for Massachusetts. Our special obligation is to bring the enormous benefits of world-class undergraduate and graduate education to the people from all segments of the state. And until we achieve the highest standard in that quest, our work will not be done.

Shouldn’t the best and the brightest students in Massachusetts have the opportunity to attend their own flagship campus which is on the same caliber as Berkeley, Michigan, North Carolina, or Virginia? Shouldn’t qualified students from working and middle-class families of Massachusetts have access to a world-class public university in their home state without a crushing debt burden? And given our absolute reliance on the development of human intellect, doesn’t our state need and deserve an institution wherefrom the best and brightest remain after graduation and contribute to the social and economic well-being of the state?

Now, I have heard the argument, “We have Harvard and MIT and all the other private colleges, why do we need a world-class public university in Massachusetts?”
The answer is clear. Harvard and MIT truly have global reach and impact, but perhaps not as much as we might think here at home.

Last year MIT enrolled more undergraduates from overseas than it did from Massachusetts. But it also enrolled more students from California, and from New York.¹

In fact, UMass Amherst has more Massachusetts undergraduates in our biochemistry department alone than MIT has in its entire undergraduate population.² The freshmen we bring in from Newton and Natick together outnumber the students MIT takes from the entire state.³

Similarly, Harvard’s entering class has a sampling of students from Massachusetts. But students from New York and Connecticut combined are a bigger presence — as are students from the southern United States.⁴

These institutions are incredibly valuable to the Commonwealth, but their role in the education of the sons and daughters of Massachusetts is actually quite modest. In fact, for all their unquestioned value to the state, the entire panoply of leading national universities⁵ located in Massachusetts — Harvard, MIT, Boston University, Boston College, Brandeis, Northeastern, Tufts, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute — provide fewer educational opportunities to Massachusetts high school graduates than UMass Amherst alone. And their focus continues to shift away from the Commonwealth’s students: the number of Massachusetts residents in their entering classes has fallen by nearly one-quarter over the past two decades, while ours has grown in similar measure.⁶

How is it, then, that public higher education, and the flagship in particular, have tended to be overlooked and under-supported in the Commonwealth? Let me give you some historical context.

The Morrill Act of 1862 paved the way for the democratizing of higher education and the advent of public universities across the nation. At the time, Massachusetts, given its long history as one of the original colonies, was already steeped in a tradition of private education.

A paper written by economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz, which was cited in a recent New York Times article, points out that those states with elite private schools in the 19th century are less likely to have developed upper-tier public universities. In the case of Massachusetts, a leadership that was invested in private education actively opposed the Morrill Act and the creation of public universities in the Commonwealth. Through their successful lobbying efforts, public higher education options in the state did not receive adequate funding and therefore did not have the opportunity to begin building a strong public higher education system — a pattern that has only started changing in recent years.

Contrast Massachusetts with states that did not have a competing and powerful tradition of private higher education at the time of the Morrill Act, and we see the development of elite public flagships such as California, Texas, Michigan, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.

¹ http://web.mit.edu/registrar/stats/geo/index.html
² www.umass.edu/oir/sites/default/files/publications/admissions_enrollment_reports/fall14.pdf
³ University of Massachusetts Amherst, Office of Institutional Research (www.umass.edu/oir)
⁴ US Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2012
⁵ US News and World Report Best Colleges Ranking, 2015
⁶ US Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)
For most of the past 153 years, this valuing of private over public education continued as Massachusetts repeatedly missed opportunities to invest in its public university. In spite of the unprecedented increases in state funding over the past three years, for which we are truly thankful, the effect of the long history of neglect has compounded over the decades, which brings us to our current challenges.

What is now holding us back from the final surge to national and international prominence? Primarily two things: 1) the need to grow our faculty, and 2) the need to extricate the campus from its exorbitant level of facilities debt service while still facing a staggering backlog of deferred maintenance.

As we have acknowledged and celebrated today, a talented faculty advances all the missions of the university. To remain competitive, the campus must attract and retain an outstanding faculty in sufficient numbers.

Our recent Doctoral Program Review provides an example of how important additional faculty is to our success. We are one of 68 national public universities with a classification of very high research activity. One telling analysis of research impact looks across doctoral programs in five broad disciplinary groups, and reports how faculty are distributed. A university is considered “dispersed” if its faculty are distributed more or less equally across these five groups, rather than being concentrated in certain programs. Of those 68 institutions, we are the 5th most dispersed campus. Generally speaking, a university that is more dispersed across the five fields indicates a lack of faculty depth, what Dean McCarthy refers to as a lack of “a deep bench” of faculty. Without this deep bench, a doctoral program has less capacity to excel. For our campus, with 47 PhD programs and limited resources, our level of dispersal quantifies a key challenge in reaching the next level of success: we must grow our faculty to reach critical mass across a broad range of excellent doctoral programs. This is the difference between us and our aspiration universities. Needless to say, a larger faculty will also lead to a much better undergraduate experience as well.

But our potential to grow is hobbled by fiscal challenges, most significantly a crushing debt burden necessitated by an aging campus and inadequate state stewardship of its enormous investment here. Worse than in most states, Massachusetts has invested very little in the construction and maintenance of academic buildings on its public university campuses over the past four decades. The vast majority of funds for essential construction and repairs come out of the same budget that struggles to pay for teaching and research. And increasingly, those dollars come from our students.

In the rare instances when the state does cover the costs of campus construction, the recent focus has tended to be on STEM-related facilities – like the Life Sciences Laboratories or the new physical sciences building – that is, investments in line with the state’s economic development strategies.

Let me emphasize, we are extremely grateful for those investments. Indeed, the success of those facilities illustrates the effective realization of potential when the state does invest in its flagship campus.

But to remain true to our values in support of all academic disciplines, and to ensure a living and learning environment that supports student success, we find ourselves either shouldering the costs of critically needed improvements such as South College – which merely replaces a failing building – or coping with woefully outdated facilities that no longer meet the needs of our students, such as the Student Union Building.
We have no choice but to invest in projects such as South College, and we chose to do this work while interest rates are low. But the fact remains, given the historical lack of state support, that we find ourselves responsible for a level of facilities debt service that undermines our current success and blocks hopes for the future.

To provide a quantifiable illustration of this situation, consider that the amount of money we currently spend on debt service would support 900 new faculty lines. Yes, I just said, “900 new faculty lines.”

Fortunately, we are at a unique moment in our history, one when we may finally alter our course and bring new support and investment to the flagship campus.

As mentioned, over the past few years, we have earned unprecedented recognition and prestige. This success is now intersecting with critical leadership alignment. On the state level, Senate President Stan Rosenberg is a proud and loyal alumnus. He has a long history of supporting public education in general, and the University of Massachusetts in particular. Additionally, there is a record number of UMass alumni in the state legislature who, along with their colleagues, have supported major increases in state funding for the university over the past several years. We are also fortunate to currently have nine members of the University Board of Trustees who are affiliated with the Amherst campus as alumni or residents of Western Massachusetts. And, very importantly, President Meehan is focused on moving the university forward, and has already demonstrated his belief that advancing the flagship campus is key to achieving the system’s ambitions.

In addition to this leadership support, the recent success of UMass Rising, the largest campaign in our history – and in the history of public higher education in Massachusetts – demonstrates the widespread willingness of our consistencies to contribute to their flagship campus.

But to seize this timely opportunity, we will need to make a strong persuasive case.

There are both principled and pragmatic reasons for why the Commonwealth should invest more heavily in the flagship campus.

On the principled side, an individual’s accident of birth should not determine the quality of one’s educational opportunities. We should not ask Massachusetts students from any walk of life to compromise when it comes to preparation for life. We need the resources to provide the citizens of Massachusetts who posses the highest intellectual potential with a world-class public higher education option at a price they can afford. The financial squeeze is particularly acute for the sons and daughters of the middle-class, because most state and federal grants are understandably directed to students from low-income families.

On the pragmatic side, this university is a perpetually replenishing source of strength for the Commonwealth. Given that human intellect is our greatest natural resource, possessing a premier public research university that supports innovation and impact by fostering cutting edge research and world-class education on a large scale is in the best interests of the state.

Consider that the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce reports that Massachusetts has the fourth-highest number of jobs requiring a bachelor’s degree in the country. And, even given its
relatively small college-educated workforce compared to much larger states, Massachusetts leads the country in terms of high-skill job openings per worker.\(^7\)

In fact, the case to support this campus is not a hard one to make. As I have mentioned, we are already excellent across many key indicators. And very importantly, we achieve this productively with extreme efficiency. In a recent *U.S. News & World Report* analysis that compared campus spending and educational quality, we were rated the 25th most efficient campus among top-rated national universities. Universities who made this list are doing a good job managing their financial resources relative to other schools that may have far greater financial resources because of more state funding, higher tuition or larger endowments.

Today, as we acknowledge and celebrate the excellence of our faculty, we stand at a crossroads. In one direction, the outdated remnants of a higher education culture defined by privilege and birthright could stymie the potential of this campus to continue its significant contribution to the well-being of the state and its citizens.

In the other direction, with the support of the state, we will achieve the opportunity that only a world-class public university can offer, and confirm that Massachusetts can truly lead the nation in innovation and in its impact on the its people.

You have my word that I will work tirelessly to make the case for investing in the flagship campus of the Commonwealth. But whether we achieve this plan and seize this moment is not solely up to me. The real work in achieving our goals will be done in the classroom, the laboratory, the library, and the campus offices. All of the reflection and the planning that we have engaged in over the past few years has led us to this point. Every department has explored how it can be more committed to its students’ success and how it can increase its research profile and impact. Every administrative and support unit has explored avenues for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Now we face the challenge of bringing those plans to life though your decisions to apply your talents and resources to the endeavors that have the most profound impact on society and our students.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of a few in our midst. As we depart, let us acknowledge that all of us, together, have the opportunity and the obligation to lift the campus to new heights. I can think of nothing more exciting, or more important.

Thank you for you continued commitment to our noble mission and for all that you do to advance the cause of the flagship campus.

GO UMASS!

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\(^7\) [https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2015/03/27/massachusetts-leads-country-jobs-for-college-grads/sKbTLNw2MWx7Rpi3hjMdP/story.html](https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2015/03/27/massachusetts-leads-country-jobs-for-college-grads/sKbTLNw2MWx7Rpi3hjMdP/story.html)