

# UMassAmherst

Chancellor Subbaswamy  
Faculty Convocation  
September 30, 2016

Good morning and congratulations to our honorees! I thank each of you – and all of our faculty – for all you do to make this university great. I am fortunate to lead a campus with such talented and dedicated colleagues.

As I begin my fifth year as Chancellor, I am immensely proud of what we have collectively accomplished. By almost every measure, from the academic profile of our students to the increasing scope and impact of our research and scholarship, we are pushing the campus to new heights – all while maintaining our ambitious goals for expanding accessibility for students from all backgrounds.

As celebrated this morning, our faculty pioneer the next frontiers of new knowledge. Your research and scholarship are garnering international recognition across disciplines. And your contributions continue to enhance lives throughout the Commonwealth and beyond.

Our student body also reflects our current success. Increasingly, we are the destination of choice for the best and the brightest in the Commonwealth, and our promise of delivering an affordable, world-class university education has never been stronger.

Our alumni and friends have contributed significantly to our success – and demonstrated an unprecedented appreciation for your efforts by supporting the *UMass Rising* campaign. We raised 379 million dollars, surpassing our goal by more than 25 percent. *UMass Rising* is the largest private fundraising effort in both the history of our campus and in the history of public higher education in the Commonwealth.

We also see concrete signs of our progress throughout campus. The exciting renovation and expansion of South College is scheduled for completion later this year, and stands as a testament to our continued commitment to humanistic studies on this campus. The Design Building, which will open in spring 2017, is a national model and advances our commitment to leadership in environmental stewardship. A few weeks ago we celebrated the start of a major expansion of the Isenberg School of Management, which goes along with the school's competitive rise in national rankings. And of course, restoration of the Old Chapel is in the final stage.

And, by now, I am sure you've heard, we have moved up, yet again, in the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings. Just four years ago, we were ranked 50th among more than 600 public, four-year universities nationally. Today we are ranked 27th – an astounding twenty-three point rise!

Now, I know the *U.S. News and World Report* ranking is a far-from-perfect measurement. But, whether we like it or not, it is the most influential ranking in the realm of national higher education. And, from that perspective, our meteoric rise in the rankings tells us we have “arrived.”

I am not saying we have arrived at our final destination, though. Our ambition continues and we have farther to travel. Where we have arrived, however, is at a higher level of competition. Four years ago, we were on the outside looking in at the top public research universities in the country. Today, those universities are our peers.

While we can take a few minutes to pat ourselves the back – as a matter of fact, we’ll do it this morning – we must then resolve to double down on our efforts. For as we continue our ambitious ascent, the competition is much greater. It is a given that our peers who now surround us have internationally renowned faculty, robust enterprises for research and scholarship, and high-achieving students.

This is the level at which we are now competing. And I know, by continuing to build on our work of the past few years, we will be prepared to meet the next level of challenges—look how far we have come!

We have intentionally adopted a culture of planning and assessment. We are now making data-informed decisions, and implementing evidence-based best practices. We have paid attention to external forces, disciplinary trends, funding realities, and public accountability. Clearly, our efforts are working. Moving forward will not become any easier.

The challenges we face are not unique to our campus. Throughout the country, universities are affected by a variety of issues, from stark financial realities to a reflection of current societal dissent and discord.

Let me first speak to the fiscal challenge.

According to a recent study by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, between 2008 and 2013, states in our country cut appropriation support per full-time equivalent student in the median public research university by more than 26 percent as measured in inflation-adjusted dollars. This decline, in part, reflects hard choices states must make in response to mandatory spending programs such as Medicaid, rising pension contributions, and the need to protect K-12 education.

And while much data exists on this topic, one additional point jumped out at me: The Academy also notes that between 1986 and 2013, growth in state general fund spending, again adjusted for inflation, increased by 5.6 percent for higher education – and 141 percent for corrections.

Meanwhile, public research universities educate four million students annually.

Public research universities award 60 percent of all doctoral degrees.

Among the 50 institutions of higher education worldwide most successful in creating venture capital-supported entrepreneurs, 20 are U.S. public research universities.

And, on average, 83 percent of first-year students at public research universities receive some form of financial aid and 31 percent receive Pell Grants, representing those students with the highest need.

What about that first year student a few decades after graduation? The average median midcareer salary for graduates of public research universities is 82,161 dollars.

Clearly, what we do as public research universities matters.

And in the coming months, we must remain focused on this important role we play in the well-being of the Commonwealth and the nation, even in the face of our financial challenges.

The reality is, our campus carries a substantial amount of debt from capital improvements – coupled with some new developments that may limit the pace of our ambitious agenda. Most notably:

- Campus earmarks from the Higher Education Bond Bill, which were slated to help with much needed deferred maintenance of Morrill, Lederle, and Machmer, have been put on hold by the Baker administration, and it is not clear if and when those resources will become available.
- The Governor has also indicated he is taking a regional approach to capital investment, and while our campus may have a role in that strategy, we are not sure what the outcome will be.
- These new developments come at a time when we are also assuming the unexpected financial obligations for funding the university's collective bargaining agreements – an obligation that in past years was met by the state.
- Further, while we are always circumspect about raising tuition, in the past, that path has allowed us to narrow the gap on mandated expenses and quality enhancement. Increasingly, however, this option is viewed unfavorably by the University Board of Trustees – which we all understand. To hold the line on tuition increases, we have already cut our budgets by more than 3 percent in the past two years.

So, how do we position ourselves for future success given the challenges we face? Here's our mantra: "We are realistic about our financial challenges, but we are defined by our quest for excellence."

In pursuit of that excellence, we will continue with the best practices that have served us so well over the past two years: aligning resource allocation with strategic priorities; giving due consideration to changes in activities among colleges and departments; improving administrative efficiencies; being more transparent in our budget dealings; and making strategic investments that protect and advance our excellence.

The dozens of strategic investments we have made or committed for this year are addressing a number of strategic priorities:

- We authorized 53 tenure track lines to build our research capacity in all of the schools and colleges, ranging from positions in English Renaissance, poetry, and African American Studies to resource economics and experimental physics.
- We authorized a significant investment in academic and career advising to reinforce our commitment to the highest quality mentoring for our undergraduates. Twelve new positions and a reallocation of six existing positions went to schools and colleges to support this need.

- We made the first in a series of investments in teaching capacity – this year in the College of Natural Science – to address the growth in enrollment we must support. One million dollars was put into hiring new instructors in the sciences, which will begin restoring the appropriate equilibrium of faculty to students.
- And, we intend to invest an additional one million dollars in the coming year to continue addressing teaching capacity.

These are just a few examples and I assure you we will continue to invest in our strategic priorities even during tough times. Such allocations are a matter of judgment and collective wisdom layered on top of what our data tell us about the flow of students through our campus. We have been planning for three years to implement a new model that captures these goals. But I recognize that it is especially hard to implement a new approach in a time when we are all reeling from the impact of a significant, externally imposed reduction in our budget. However, in light of the looming uncertainties regarding our state appropriation and potential limits on tuition increases, we will slow down the process of “formalizing” an activity-based budget model. We have learned an enormous amount over the past two years as we’ve explored alternative approaches to our budget process – and we will use that knowledge as we continue with our current system of data-informed, priority-based budget allocation in a collaborative approach.

Of course, we will continue to press for greater investment from the state. I call on all of our allies and supporters—from alumni and business partners to our labor union members—to rally in support of public higher education.

To do nothing while we wait for the State to do its fair share is a recipe for falling behind. We will increase stewardship of existing resources, and find new ways of funding our priorities by taking advantage of our academic strengths to reach new and non-traditional audiences.

For example, over 70 percent of higher education seekers today are non-traditional students. Given these demographic changes and job market trends, Continuing and Professional Education holds great promise for expansion, and I am very pleased with the efforts being made across our academic units as we explore possibilities for broadening our educational reach while finding new funding sources.

As the demographic of regional high school graduates decreases, we are building on international recruitment opportunities. With our rising global reputation, we are seeing a rapid spike in the number of international undergraduate applications. This fall, nearly 8 percent of our entering class is international.

And, many are suggesting the concept of a “Flagship Fee,” an additional levy to attend the flagship campus, but we must ensure our indicators of success defensibly warrant this fee.

As we continue working together, one thing is clear: our recently renewed focus on student success must continue apace regardless of our financial challenges. Our ability to clearly articulate and demonstrate our value as the flagship campus of the Commonwealth is critical to our success – and best served by delivering on our promise of a world-class, accessible, education to all deserving students. If we protect this promise, all else will follow.

Let me now turn to the challenge of building inclusive excellence at universities while vigorously protecting academic freedom and First Amendment rights. Since its founding in 1915, the AAUP has had as its core mission the protection of academic freedom. Their Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure reads:

“Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.

Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning.”

As university faculty, we have the privilege of pursuing discovery and new knowledge in an environment predicated on the importance of academic freedom. Here, the shared priority is to push the boundaries of knowledge. Through the inventiveness of trial and error, the exchange of ideas, peer critique, and heated debate, we remain focused on our research and scholarship.

It is this principle of academic freedom that has allowed us to achieve our role as respected faculty. It is what brings us together this morning to celebrate the accomplishments of colleagues. It is what allows us to pursue our passions and seek the truth, however messy that process may be.

As the beneficiaries and keepers of academic freedom, we must protect it, both in our role as researchers, and also in our role as teachers. As the AAUP states, “Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning.”

The current national discussion focuses on what some perceive as a choice between preserving academic freedom or compromising that freedom by creating university environments void of controversy and debate. The other side of the discussion argues that fostering a living and learning environment that protects and respects all individuals encourages true academic freedom by ensuring everyone is empowered to speak and learn.

If, as faculty, we limit ourselves and our students only to speech with which we agree, we are not delivering on the promise of providing a world-class education. To fully reach intellectual potential, our students must be challenged and exposed to the richly varied ideas and information that this university has to offer. We must impart to our students that it is their responsibility as individuals to sort through this cacophony of viewpoints and arrive at their own truths.

If students limit themselves only to speech with which they currently agree, they have squandered the promise for intellectual and personal development that a diverse university like ours offers. I suggest, as intelligent and thoughtful people, we are capable of exploring nuanced solutions and exercising common sense, as we engage our students in pursuit of the truth while acknowledging the influential role we play in their lives and our role as supportive mentor and educator. I urge all faculty to actively get engaged in learning how to create a climate which values both the free market of ideas while being broadly inclusive.

Our role, as the flagship campus of the Commonwealth with an array of public post-secondary institutions, is to provide the highest achieving students in the state with a globally competitive university education. By offering an affordable alternative to the private elite colleges and universities, students from middle and working class families in Massachusetts have an opportunity to attain a highly rated university degree – and the state is ensured a talented and educated labor force.

Welcoming students with a wide range of experiences and perspectives, while continuing to foster a living and learning environment defined by the vigorous – albeit respectful – exchange of ideas, gives us the greatest opportunity to protect academic freedom on our campus while demonstrating our value to the Commonwealth.

In an effort to ensure all our students benefit from living and learning with peers who reflect the diversity of society at large, in recent years, we have successfully implemented strategies focused on increasing recruitment of underrepresented and underserved students.

This fall, our ALANA student population increased from 24 percent to about 29 percent and the under-represented minority population increased by more than a percentage point to 13 percent. We also welcomed a total of 1,672 first-generation students, including transfer students. Meanwhile, the entering Class of 2020 arrived with average SATs of 1225/1600, a GPA of 3.82, and a high school rank in the top fifth of their graduating class.

As we witness the current national rhetoric concerning racial, ethnic and religious minorities, it is with renewed commitment we continue moving forward, serving all deserving students from all backgrounds.

Of course, another critical component is fostering a diverse faculty. It's imperative we have the advantage of working with colleagues who bring a broad spectrum of academic perspectives into our schools and colleges, while our students have the opportunity to learn from faculty whose expertise and experience accurately reflect the world they will enter after graduation.

Over the past few years, we have put a great deal of thought into our recruitment and hiring processes. In particular, the revised Campus High Impact Program – or “CHIP” – and the Target of Opportunity Program – or “TOO” – have proven to be positive initiatives.

Even with modest support for these two programs, we are encouraged by our recruitment success. We hired 73 faculty members last year: 49.3 percent were female and approximately 40 percent were minorities. Given these positive indicators, these programs will continue even with our tighter budgets this year.

In addition to recruiting a diverse faculty and student body, fostering a campus environment that truly supports every member of our community is critical to our ongoing success. In November, we are conducting a Campus Climate survey. The questions in the survey will ask you to respond candidly, as a member of this community, and share your personal experiences and observations related to issues of diversity, equity and inclusion on our campus. I cannot overemphasize how important it is for everyone to participate in this survey. I ask each one of you to add your voice to this effort as we strive to create an environment respectful of all. The survey data collected will guide our process for Diversity Strategic Planning in specific and tangible ways, including campus policies, priorities, and distribution of resources. I thank you in advance for your participation in this important campus initiative.

This morning, as we celebrate our colleagues and a new academic year, I thank all of you for your dedication to this great university. As we continue moving forward, building on our excellence, we acknowledge our achievements will be hard won. Success under resource-poor conditions requires intelligence, discipline, resolve, and resourcefulness. Fortunately, all four are plentiful on this campus.

Congratulations to our honorees, thank you and GO UMASS!