

Public Higher Education Network Of Massachusetts

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The election of Deval Patrick has inspired hope among many stakeholders of Massachusetts' system of public higher education. With the election of this governor, we have a unique opportunity to push forward a bold, progressive agenda for quality, affordable, well-funded public higher education.

There is no single organization that advocates for public higher education in Massachusetts. In the past, unions, student groups, and other advocates have often lobbied separately, and rarely coordinated their agendas. This has made it hard to mobilize parents, alumni, and the tens of thousands of people who have a stake in an improved system. Similarly, the community colleges, state colleges, and university system have insufficiently coordinated their efforts and rarely seen their success as linked to each other. Having the diverse constituents united in one organization will promote an inclusive, respectful and productive integration of goals, allowing for a coordinated and powerful effort on behalf of all of public higher education in Massachusetts. That statewide organization, now forming, is tentatively called PHENOM – the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts.

On December 1, 2006, a coalition of students, staff and faculty based primarily at UMass Amherst hosted a "Public Higher Education Summit" that was attended by 800 people including Governor-Elect Patrick. At this summit, the coalition presented a policy report entitled "Advancing Public Higher Education: A Roadmap for Gov. Patrick" (www.umass.edu/msp/) which was well-received by Patrick and other key leaders.

The summit and the Roadmap received significant media attention, and there is now substantive discussion around the key question facing public higher education in Massachusetts: will our system becoming increasingly under-staffed, inaccessible, and subject to the whims of private donors, or will we be able to finally build a fully-funded, affordable, accessible, fully-staffed and democratic system of public higher education that serves ALL the residents of the commonwealth?

The UMass coalition concluded that to have a strong impact on the future of public higher education, we need to rapidly broaden our coalition to be statewide and to represent all stakeholders. We truly believe this is a key moment in the struggle to improve our higher education system. While we take Governor Patrick at his word that he will be a "champion for public higher education," we know that a united and powerful statewide movement will help him be that champion and will allow us to have greater influence with the Legislature.

The initiators of this project envision PHENOM as an inclusive coalition that brings the various stakeholders together to democratically decide the organization's principles and program. We think that the Roadmap presented to Governor Patrick is a good indicator of the coalition's direction, but we know that it will be modified as dozens of organizations join PHENOM.

While there will certainly be a role for individuals in PHENOM, we initially look for key organizations on each of the 29 public campuses to join and develop a structure that will allow for democratic and efficient decision-making. Joining PHENOM means an organization:

- ** is committed to a unified approach to improving the whole public higher ed. system
- ** generally supports PHENOM's statement of principles (still being revised)
- ** actively works to educate and mobilize its constituency around a democratically agreed-upon program and set of activities consistent with the principles
- ** participates in and votes on PHENOM's governing body
- ** encourages organizing on its campus, in a student-staff-faculty coalition, around issues of particular local concern

In the past, different groups have sometimes come together for a specific purpose: to fight for increased funds in a budget, to get union contracts funded, or to fight a particular fee increase. These efforts, while worthwhile and sometimes successful, have not left a permanent organization in their wake, an organization that can continue to do the research, organizing, advocacy, public relations, and mobilizing necessary for the sustained attention public higher education needs. PHENOM will hopefully create a structure and a program that can sustain it for the long haul.

PHENOM's founding convention will take place Wednesday, February 14 in the Gardner Auditorium at the State House. We hope that each major constituency from every campus will be represented that day.

For more information, or if you would like someone to attend a meeting of your organization, please contact PHENOM at massphenom@gmail.com or 413-577-4121.