

Provost's Statement on the CHASS Proposal to the Faculty Senate
February 24, 2011

Three years ago, Chancellor Holub was recruited by the Board of Trustees to lead UMass Amherst to the doorstep of the American Association of Universities, an association of the 63 highest caliber research universities in North America. I say doorstep, because a University aspiring to belong to the AAU can transform itself to look like an AAU university, with respect to the criteria that are important to membership, but universities have to be invited to join by the existing AAU members. A year after his recruitment, Chancellor Holub recruited me to assist in that effort. He and I bring to this effort a combined experience of more than a half century as faculty members at AAU universities, much of that as faculty leaders. One perspective that I have drawn from my experiences in AAU universities is that the way an institution is organized does matter when it comes to promoting and supporting faculty research and scholarship and the educational missions of the institution. In that context, the proposal for the formation of CHASS that I submitted to the Senate last month was an action taken toward the goal of moving UMass Amherst toward the standards set by the AAU.

The Chancellor and I both believe that formation of CHASS would be a strong positive step in our alignment with AAU standards. This is not simply because it would make us appear more like public AAU universities, which have in recent years moved from an assortment of both decentralized and aggregated collegiate models to a much broader adoption of more aggregated colleges. It is for the much more fundamental reason that drove this transition in the AAU: More aggregated, less siloed collegiate units are demonstrably better at promoting cutting edge interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research than are smaller, more narrowly defined units.

I submitted the CHASS proposal to the Faculty Senate last month with the hope of engaging the faculty across the campus, but especially in the Colleges of Humanities & Fine Arts and Social & Behavioral Sciences, in a discussion on the creation of CHASS and how the new college might help the campus' efforts to align with AAU standards. I knew from the beginning that critical to this discussion would be the early identification of interim leadership for CHASS, a point emphasized many times in the report from the 2009-2010 joint task force on the merger. I immediately engaged the Rules Committee to sort out a procedure for doing so that would honor the established procedures for

naming interim leadership of existing schools and colleges. We agreed that I would meet with the combined College Personnel Committees and with the combined department heads and chairs of the two colleges. Those meetings were held last week; however, by the time that they could be held, the atmosphere for the discussions that I had sought had become so clouded as to make those discussions difficult, if not impossible.

It became clear to me that in order to engage in a reasonable discussion about CHASS, there needed to be time for the atmosphere to clear. I broached with the combined College Personnel Committees and with the combined heads and chairs what I described as Plan B: continuing the existing colleges through 2011-2012, and charging the two interim deans with addressing some of the implementation concerns identified by the joint task force, *e.g.*, combining efforts in the area of research support, while my administrative colleagues and I addressed others, *e.g.*, short- and long-term solutions to housing a CHASS dean's office. I asked neither group for a vote, but came away from both meetings with a clear sense of a consensus in favor of Plan B.

I subsequently met with the Academic Priorities Council, which had been designated the lead council in the Senate's consideration of the CHASS proposal, and along with a general discussion about the proposal, we discussed Plan B. Though again I did not ask for a formal vote, after I left the Council meeting, the Chair, Professor Bogartz, informed me that they had taken a vote and that the members of the Council present had voted unanimously for Plan B, without taking a position on the formation of CHASS itself.

Informed by these meetings, I have decided to execute Plan B. I therefore withdraw the CHASS proposal that I submitted last month, and I will move forward immediately to identify interim leadership for the two existing colleges, according to established procedures. I take this action with the anticipation that I will submit to the Senate a modified proposal for the formation of CHASS sometime during the upcoming academic year.

Thank you.