

FACULTY CONVOCATION 2010

Delivered October 1, 2010, by Chancellor Robert C. Holub

As I enter into my third year as Chancellor at this wonderful institution, I am reminded of the need to make myself understood and to communicate clearly with all constituents on campus. Communication of this sort is especially important since the current budget challenges with which we are confronted are complex, and the strategies we have adopted in dealing with them are often multifaceted and sometimes involve several different steps. In this climate of intricate details and uncertainties it is sometimes difficult to maintain complete transparency.

In this context I recall something from my scholarly career, an anecdote that the German poet and critic Heinrich Heine told about the celebrated philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. You are no doubt aware that Hegel was renowned for the difficulty, or even obscurity, of his writing, and any of you who have delved into Hegel's philosophy can certainly verify that it is by no means an easy read. Heine relates the following story: "When Hegel was lying on his deathbed, he said, 'Only one person has understood me,' but immediately afterward he added irritably, 'and he didn't understand me either.'" It would be presumptuous of me to compare myself with one of the most brilliant philosophers of German idealism. But sometimes, I too have the impression that what I have said or written is not fully understood, or badly understood. Over the past two years we have placed a premium on campus communication, but sometimes I can't help feeling that, in the words of another immortal philosopher: "a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest." That sentence actually comes from Paul Simon, probably known better for his duets with Art Garfunkel than for his philosophical prowess. In any event this convocation address seeks to clarify intentions and directions, so that on my deathbed, where I hope I won't be lying anytime soon, I won't have the same feeling that Hegel purportedly expressed.

My purpose today is really the same one I've had for the past two years: to explain to the campus where I think we ought to go, to outline some of the steps we are taking or have taken to move the campus forward, and to earn support for these steps and goals from the most important constituency on the campus for achieving any sort of success: the faculty. I believe I have been clear from the very start of my term as Chancellor about our ultimate aim: to be counted among the best public research institutions in the country. We can already claim that we are the finest public research institution in New England by any measure of academic quality. But it is equally certain that in terms of academic achievement we do not yet measure up to the great institutions in several other states. When I first came to the campus in the fall of 2008, I was often questioned about my views on the flagship status of UMass Amherst. My reaction initially was one of perplexity: outside of Massachusetts there was no doubt that Amherst is the flagship campus. It is the only comprehensive public campus that has universal name recognition, and, after Harvard and MIT, it is considered the best research institution in the state, public or private.

Having now spent over two years in Massachusetts, however, I understand a bit better the anxiety that surrounded the questions about the flagship. But my response remains largely the same. In essence, I hold the following conviction: we should worry less about being called the flagship campus and more about being the flagship campus. If we excel in the ways that flagship campuses excel, and in the way that great institutions of higher education excel, if we profile ourselves as the flagship campus, then the recognition will come naturally, and the entire question can be put to rest.

Although my response is largely the same, I've learned that it's not quite that simple. Too often UMass Amherst is considered an institution whose reach is confined to Western Massachusetts, and sometimes we contribute to this impression by acting as if we were comfortable with that role.

The goal, therefore, that we must achieve is to assume our rightful place as the flagship institution for the Commonwealth, and we assume this place not by insisting that people designate us as the flagship, or that the Trustees inscribe it into a document, but by adopting policies and programs, by implementing educational and pedagogical advances, and by undertaking initiatives and establishing standards that are associated across the country with flagship campuses and great public research institutions.

In the central administration all of our efforts will be focused on achieving this goal. We must utilize all the tools and energies we have, whether they be associated with marketing and branding, with enrollment management, with athletics, with research, with student success, with outreach, or with fundraising, in our effort to be, and to be recognized as, the Commonwealth's flagship. We must become for Massachusetts, what Ohio State is for Ohio, or Penn State is for Pennsylvania, or the Madison campus is for the state of Wisconsin. In doing so, we will not only attain our rightful status, we will also fulfill the Nietzschean exhortation to "become who we are."

However, before I outline some of the strategic planning initiatives we have formulated in the central administration to this end, I must first mention briefly our budget situation and the campus response to it during the past year, because many of our actions will make sense only when placed in this larger context.

It will come as no surprise to the campus that we are living through a severe economic crisis in the state, the nation, and the world. For the past two years we have been shielded somewhat from the most deleterious consequences of this crisis by federal stimulus monies. But with the end of stimulus funding this year and with a poor outlook for state allocations and for further federal stimulus, we will have to find other ways to survive the crisis intact.

This year we will receive a state allocation that is over thirty million dollars less than our appropriation was just two years ago when I became chancellor. In terms of the state appropriation plus stimulus funding, we will likely receive thirty million dollars less this year than last year. Indeed, adjusting for inflation and looking back in time, we come to the sad realization that the Commonwealth funds us at a lower level this year than it did

in the year 2000, although the number of students we have on campus is several thousand more today than it was a decade ago.

While the state economy appears to be recovering slowly, the reality is that the Commonwealth's budget contains a large structural deficit resulting from the use of stimulus funding to support recurring or base expenses. Reductions of over \$2 billion will be necessary to close the budget gap, and there are a limited number of options for reduction. We are one of those options.

On the positive side, thanks to the tremendous effort on the campus we have been able to reduce our base commitments by more than \$19 million over the past two years. We have also generated considerable revenue this year, and by the end of 2010-11 we anticipate we will have generated over \$10 million in new revenues. A good portion of these new revenues comes from the non-resident students we have attracted to campus: this year's incoming class contains 350 more out-of-state students than last year's. A good part of the credit for this remarkable achievement goes to the faculty, who engaged successfully in recruiting non-Massachusetts residents to campus.

The \$30 million we have realized in budget reductions and in new revenues, however, will not be enough to close the budget gaps that we will face over the next three years. We are paddling our boat at a rapid pace, but the current we are facing continues to push us further downstream. Therefore, we will have to redouble our efforts to generate revenues this year if we are going to avoid further reductions to base budgets.

In sum, we have done tremendous work as a campus, and we have every right to be proud of what we have accomplished. But if we take our foot off the accelerator now—here I shift from the aquatic to the terrestrial register of metaphors—we risk losing the race that we must win to finish in the ranks of the top public campuses in the country. Now let me return to the tasks that face us and that we must accomplish, even in these times of financial distress, if we are going to be a genuine flagship campus for the Commonwealth.

Public flagships depend heavily on their undergraduate education, and they are going to succeed as flagship campuses and be recognized as great flagship campuses insofar as they attend to the quality of classroom instruction they provide and exhibit requisite attention and dedication to student success.

We face a special challenge in Massachusetts, one found throughout the northeast, but particularly in the Commonwealth. The small liberal arts college and its curriculum have traditionally defined the quality of undergraduate education here. Unlike Ohio or Wisconsin or even California or Arizona, the size of the campus has often been considered to correlate negatively with academic excellence. In addition, a focus on research is often viewed as a hindrance to classroom activities involving undergraduates, since faculty are regarded as making a choice between research or scholarly activity and a focus on students and pedagogy.

If we are going to succeed as the Commonwealth's flagship, we must make our size and our research prowess productive for undergraduate education. Our putative deficiencies have to become defining differentiators for UMass Amherst. Size must be rethought and conceived as increased opportunities for education inside and outside the classroom. The number of majors, the diversity of faculty expertise, and the extracurricular clubs and organizations that we have at UMass provide students a unique chance to realize their educational potential, and no other public campus in the Commonwealth offers a similar benefit. Research and scholarship on the part of the faculty must be refashioned as an advantage in that undergraduates are learning from the direct producers of knowledge. In contrast to the small liberal arts college, we have a faculty directly involved in the production of pioneering research, scholarship, and creative activity.

We must make certain that students at UMass have the opportunity to participate in the production of knowledge by establishing, maintaining, and fostering research programs that incorporate a greater percentage of the student population. Our goal is to transform undergraduate education on the Amherst campus to present students with opportunities that only we as the Commonwealth's flagship can provide: capstone programs with faculty experts, education abroad experiences with the scores of international institutions with which we have programs or agreements, and connections to the community in either service learning or student internships. In short, instead of denying our essential qualities and trying to be something we aren't, we have to embrace our size and research focus as part of a vital and more effective way to educate undergraduate students.

At the same time we have to continue to acknowledge that education at UMass Amherst is a total experience, not confined to the classroom. Our Division of Student Affairs and Campus Life must further its partnership with Academic Affairs, promoting living/learning environments that will benefit the undergraduate population. Right now around 60% of the students who are new to the campus are integrated into a living/learning community. We know that these structures assist enormously with the transition from high school to higher education, that they improve first-to-second-year retention, and that they provide a firmer and more satisfying basis for students to achieve their educational and career goals. We must expand these communities and provide these opportunities for all students who want them.

But we must also assist the transition to campus by expanding access to the faculty, especially in the initial semesters on campus. To this end we are continuing this year with our various seminar programs conducted through student housing, and we have expanded the faculty first-year seminars. Approximately forty sections of these small-enrollment courses are being offered this fall, almost all taught by tenure-track faculty on a topic about which they are passionate. I am teaching a seminar for the second year in a row on Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, whose title suggests it is perhaps a manual for administrators, but which is actually a great introduction to the late philosophy of this fascinating thinker. Ultimately we hope to offer a hundred faculty first-year seminars per semester, so that every student who wants such an experience can have one. I encourage everyone here to consider participating in this program and assure you that you will find it to be a great teaching and learning experience.

We must also tend to special undergraduate populations on campus. The sophomore year is often neglected in undergraduate education, and we should make certain that we develop appropriate programs and guidance for this crucial period. Students who have transitioned well from high school, but still have not found their academic place need special attention: assisting them in making prudent choices of majors and career paths is an essential goal for our focus on the second-year on campus.

We must also continue to nurture Commonwealth Honors College. As you know, the \$3.6 million budget line dedicated to our honors college was eliminated by the legislature last year. However, Commonwealth Honors College has become an essential part of UMass Amherst and plays a crucial role in our status as the Commonwealth's flagship institution. In the next years we are looking forward to expanding the living/learning opportunities for honors students and to appointing a faculty dedicated in part to instruction in CHC.

I have spoken thus far about transformative initiatives in undergraduate education that we must undertake to ensure that students at UMass receive a first-class education. But we also have to be certain that we continue to provide access to students from across the Commonwealth and the nation, that we adhere to our tradition of providing a quality educational experience for first-generation and low-income students, as well as students of diverse backgrounds.

Over the past decade we have dramatically increased need-based financial aid to students, and we must continue to provide grants to meritorious students to fulfill our flagship role. In addition, we will seek to expand targeted programs to bring to the campus students from low-income areas who do not usually consider UMass Amherst an option. Serving as a model for these types of initiatives will be the Chelsea program we initiated last year. It pledges scholarship support to deserving students who matriculate from the local high school or after an associate's degree at Bunker Hill Community College.

We will also be seeking to establish a smoother path for students from community colleges who wish to continue their studies on our campus. Eventually we hope to implement a community college compact with UMass Amherst to facilitate educational opportunities for students from across the state attending two-year schools. We believe that the combination of two years at a community college and two years at UMass Amherst gives the Commonwealth a less expensive way to increase the number of baccalaureate degrees and provides realistic options for a citizenry concerned about the financial burden of higher education.

In this regard we will also be implementing several three-year baccalaureate majors and a few four-year master's programs. Not every student will be eligible for these accelerated options. But those sufficiently prepared and willing to put in the requisite time and effort will realize considerable savings in educational costs and additional financial benefits from entering the job market at an earlier date.

Let me turn now to the faculty and to some areas we must address if we are to reach our goal of rising into the top tier of public research universities.

Faculty salaries at UMass Amherst are too low. They are lower than the average salaries in our peer group, which includes schools with which we compete for faculty on a national level, and they are lower than the compensation at many colleges and universities in Massachusetts, whose faculties do not have the research and scholarly credentials that we have. Over the next five years we will seek to rectify this situation by providing, whenever possible, merit-based and market-driven increases to faculty compensation. Our goal will be to raise the average salary of faculty members on the campus over the 50th percentile of our peer group. Recognizing that graduate stipends are similarly depressed on the campus, we have adopted a similar goal for graduate student compensation.

We will also seek to add to the faculty. The Provost has already outlined a program that will establish a standing faculty for Commonwealth Honors College via joint appointments, and we have just completed an exercise that granted faculty positions on a competitive basis in cohort hiring. In the coming years we will continue these sorts of programs to strengthen the faculty by strategic recruiting and appointments.

Faculty in disciplines and sub-disciplines that do not usually qualify for sponsored research often feel less supported by the campus. I do not believe that this feeling is always justified, and I would point out that I come from one of these disciplines and that I existed on a campus for over a quarter of a century that valued sponsored research very highly. Nonetheless, we must strive on this campus to provide requisite support for our excellent faculty in departments that do not have external grant funding. It is important that we maintain a balance on the campus, that we take pride in being a comprehensive institution of higher education, and, above all, that as an academic community, as a university, we value all types of research and creative activity carried out by our prestigious faculty.

To assure that our faculty achieve their personal goals, we must continue to enhance our campus facilities. Faculty must have adequate spaces to research and to teach; students must have an environment in which they can learn most effectively. The majority of the buildings on campus are thirty to fifty years old; some are even older, and many have outlived their efficacy owing to deficiencies in infrastructure. We can take pride in the new facilities that have opened on campus over the past few years, but we must keep moving forward, taking the opportunity to erect new structures when the funding is available, and to renovate spaces that are still functional. We are therefore proceeding with campus master planning and forging ahead on various projects that will be of great benefit to the campus community. It is unfortunate that we have to devote operating funds to pay off debt service on facilities, but we believe that our investment is ultimately essential for a successful research institution in the twenty-first century.

A further area of emphasis for the state's flagship campus must be a focus on the environment and sustainability. We have much to be proud of on the campus, but we

must continue to emphasize environmental initiatives in research, teaching, and in construction. We must design and build facilities that qualify for at least LEED silver certification and strive to fulfill the ambitious goal of carbon neutrality by the middle of the century. In addition we must be certain that we establish opportunities for students on campus to become involved with environmental and sustainability initiatives, while at the same time continuing to promote research in these areas. Our engagement with environmental initiatives is a multifaceted commitment that ultimately supports state priorities, academic interests, and the future wellbeing of the planet.

I have emphasized that UMass Amherst will be profiling itself as the Commonwealth's flagship campus. As many of you know, we have established an office in Boston, currently staffed by a development officer and a recent hire in state government relations, and we foresee growth in the eastern part of the state, where the vast majority of our alumni and current students have permanent residence. We will seek to increase our presence and visibility in and around Boston with everything from faculty lectures to athletic contests.

But we also recognize that we have a special responsibility to the Western regions of the state, and in particular to the largest city in Western Massachusetts, Springfield. We have made a good deal of progress with the Springfield-UMass relationship, and we must continue to promote and collaborate with Springfield and other communities in our region if we are going to fulfill our flagship mission. We will work closely with Baystate Health on our joint research initiative, the Pioneer Valley Life Sciences Institute, and we will actively seek other opportunities with Baystate to expand our partnership and assist Springfield and surrounding communities. We will pursue opportunities with other ventures, such as the Green High Performance Computing Center in Holyoke, and work especially hard with Amherst and other communities to promote projects that are mutually beneficial. Above all, in connection with our pledge to provide access to low-income and first-generation students, we will expand our efforts to attract students from Springfield and other neighboring communities to UMass Amherst, so that we can contribute to the economic development of Western Massachusetts with what we do best: educating a citizenry who will devote itself and its talents to the welfare of towns and cities, both in the region and across the state.

If we are going to accomplish the goals I have sketched today, we are going to have to work together. All constituencies of the campus are important for achieving our ambitions, but none is more crucial than the faculty. Twice over the past year I have called for increased sensitivity to civility and an attitude of mutual respect, and I renew that plea again today. I recognize that the campus has been placed under a good deal of stress by the economic crisis, and since I do not anticipate an improved budget for the campus in the next couple of years, that level of stress will likely persist. I also understand all too well that when choices are made, there will be disagreement about the nature of these decisions. In speaking with disgruntled groups on campus, I have often been told that I have made a bad choice after deciding on one or another difficult issue. Often I readily agree, but I add that in most cases I am not choosing between a good and a bad option, but between two bad options. I believe, however, that if we try to

understand differing points of view by assuming the perspective of the other, by trying to stand in someone else's shoes, then we will not be so quick to point fingers and to create acrimony on campus.

Moreover, if we are going to achieve our potential as the Commonwealth's flagship campus, we must be cautious about our actions and words. My view, the view of the senior staff, as well as the opinions of professionals in the area of university relations and extensive research on media affairs all concur that presenting the campus as in crisis, demoralized, or in decline will not secure for us the resources we desire from the state. Indeed, such presentations also hinder other priorities of the campus, such as attracting more accomplished in-state and out-of-state students. The strategy that this campus has adopted, therefore, after consultation with the best professional advisors is to be forthright about the challenges we face, but to emphasize our amazing achievements and potential for future accomplishments. I implore you to be circumspect when speaking with the media about our challenges, and to be mindful of the campus and its reputation. Today I have not devoted my time to enumerating the significant achievements of the campus, and I don't want my neglect of these accomplishments to signal a lack of appreciation for them. Let me just mention for the record that we again had the greatest number of applicants and the best prepared first-year cohort in our history; that we graduated a record number of baccalaureates last spring; that our fundraising totals for last year were at an all-time high; that we received over \$40 million in stimulus research grants alone; and that faculty, students, and staff from UMass Amherst continue to be honored and showered with awards and recognition. We have established a web site dedicated to our points of pride. It is updated regularly, and I encourage you to visit it to see for yourselves how exciting and accomplished this campus is.

Here my communication for today comes to an end. I hope that I can say with more confidence than Hegel that I have been understood. In the coming year I look forward to working with you and other members of this campus community on our most important mission: to assume our rightful place as the Commonwealth's flagship institution. Thank you for your attention.