

**Academic Priorities Council
Academic Year 2007-2008**

**An Exploration into Improving Academic Supply (Deliverables)
Relative to Student Demand**

Council Membership (2008-09): Richard Bogartz, Bryan Harvey, Ernest May, Kathy Debevec, Randall Knoper, Jonathan Schaffer, Eliot Moss, Monroe Rabin, Margaret Allard, Jean DeMartinis, James Rinderle, Curt Conner, Carolyn Cave, Dayo Gore, Dara Wier, Matteo Pangallo, Jimmy Cheung, Noreen Lemieux, Anne Benz

UMASS seeks to be a top tier public university. Research is a critical component to achieving that stature; however, we also need to keep our academic priorities in balance. Our reputation and ranking as a university will be based on faculty research as well as our academic programs, students' academic experience, and the caliber of students we attract. Balancing our academic priorities with our research mission is critically important in the strategic planning process.

The quality of the academic experience UMASS provides will determine the quality of the students it attracts and its future enrollment and retention. The University's goal is to attract the best students and be a destination school for students rather than a fall back or safety school. This will become increasingly challenging as the number of high school graduates decreases as projected between 2007 and 2018, and competition for the best students intensifies.

Student satisfaction is critical in attracting the best students and retaining those students. An important dimension of satisfaction is students' ability to get into their chosen major and the courses they seek. For many students, their options are limited by the University's inability to accommodate their choice of major or course of study. An imbalance exists between students' academic goals and the university's ability to provide the courses needed to achieve those goals while maintaining a high quality academic experience. UMASS will only be a destination school if students' academic goals can be achieved in a high quality academic environment.

The imbalance is a result of factors such as the size of the student body relative to the size of faculty, limitations in classroom facilities, resource allocation, and concerns about increasing the use of lecturers and the amount of instruction delivered in large classes and online while maintaining the quality of students' academic experience.

The instructional supply and demand imbalance points to several important issues in need of resolve. In the strategic planning process, we need to focus on the highest impact solutions to these issues.

- What is the ideal enrollment level at the University?
- What is the ideal balance between faculty and lecturers in order to satisfy demand while providing the highest quality instruction and meeting the University's research mission?
- How much instruction do we want to offer in large classes and online? How does this fit with our goal to enhance students' academic experience?

- Should facilities planning invest in lecture halls, small classrooms, or mid-sized classrooms?

The Academic Priorities Council devoted several meetings to gaining an understanding of the University's current ability to meet student demand for courses and majors relative to the University's allocation of academic resources. To this end, several University officials were interviewed in order to gain their perspective on student demand for courses and majors, the University's current ability to meet this demand, and issues for consideration as the University moves forward in its strategic planning. The individuals interviewed included (1) Kevin Kelly, Director of Admissions, (2) Pamela Marsh-Williams, Associate Provost, Undergraduate Advising, John Cunningham, Deputy Provost, and (3) Janet Rifkin, Dean, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Karen Schoenberger, Assistant Dean, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. A summary of the discussion from the meetings follows.

Highlights from the meetings and the APCs discussions related to the issues identified include:

- Student enrollment at the University is currently at capacity with 19,000 students. Classrooms are fully scheduled throughout the day. A significant number of students cannot be admitted to their school/major of choice and are encouraged to select other related courses of study, resulting in dissatisfaction. For example, according to Kevin Kelly, approximately 15% of freshman seek business, 400 freshman are accepted into SOM, and 400 are turned down and enter as undecided students. These students often move into economics, resource economics or the social and behavioral sciences. A similar situation occurs with restricted majors such as communications and journalism in which students turned away enter other disciplines. Advisors acknowledge that it is difficult to shift demand and direct students into majors in which they have little interest. On the flip side, student satisfaction is highest in smaller majors that can offer smaller classes and in which students have greater contact with faculty advisors. The Provost's Admissions and Enrollment Committee similarly concluded that "the strongest, most attractive programs have achieved that status because they have restricted enrollment to a number they can serve well," thus balancing capacity and quality.
- Student satisfaction suffers when students have difficulty getting the courses they need. This frustration is communicated to potential applicants making it more difficult for us to attract the best students. For example, statistics and methods courses, which are prerequisites for psychology, sociology, economics, and anthropology are often a bottleneck because of limitations with computer labs in which the classes are taught. Psychology is an open major with 1,600 students and the department does not have enough faculty relative to student demand. Economics has difficulty staffing courses for their own majors in addition to students seeking to minor in economics. Decreasing enrollment is problematic given that the University's revenue stream is dependent upon enrollment, yet it is also challenging to effectively deliver a high quality education with the current number of students.
- The quality of instruction can be compromised with high levels of enrollment. Currently, 50% of instructional hours take place in large lecture halls that are tightly scheduled

throughout the day. Communications courses are offered in a large lecture format without discussion sections. Senior surveys in SBS indicated that student satisfaction is lowest for students in the largest majors who must take a significant number of their classes in a large lecture format. This raises questions about further investment in classroom facilities and the nature of that investment, whether to build mid-sized auditoriums accommodating 75-150 students, large auditoriums, or smaller classroom facilities. What we do know is that the current availability of classroom space is a problem.

- Lecturers are frequently added to try to accommodate both anticipated and unanticipated demand. Today, 52% of instruction is delivered by tenure track faculty (vs. 66% in 1996). Communication and journalism are heavily staffed by lecturers and part-timers. The ratio of lecturers to faculty may have potential implications for accreditation, the quality of education, etc. The quality of academic advising can be compromised in large majors such as psychology and sociology. Staff and peer advisors are relied upon for advising rather than faculty and they are often not in the best position to provide the range of advice sought by students (e.g. advice on career opportunities, their education, and life). Students seek personal interaction with departments and their faculty.
- The issues have strategic implications for the Strategic Planning Task Force, Facilities Planning, the Amherst 250 Plan, the General Education Task Force, enrollment management, and pedagogy (online vs. classroom instruction, blended instruction, etc.)

**Summary of Discussion with Kevin Kelly, Director of Admissions
November 20, 2007**

- The most competitive programs for freshman to get into are the Isenberg School of Management and, sport management, in particular. About 1 in 4 conversations with prospective students and parents center on these programs and their ability to get into them. HTM has also begun to come up more often in conversations this year than over the past two years.
 - Approximately 400 students are accepted into SOM upon coming to the university. Those applying to SOM but not accepted are classified as undecided. There were about 1200 undecided freshman last year. About 400 were SOM wannabes. These students often move into the social and behavioral sciences and economics.
 - Among students taking the SATs, 15% prefer business.
- Other conversations with parents and students are frequently focused on the areas of English, History, Government, the social sciences, health professions, and Public Health.
- In addition to Management, other attractive and/or competitive programs include Engineering, Nursing, Music, Art, and Dance, Computer Science, Psychology, and Communications.
 - Nursing has 64 slots in total. Approximately 250 students were accepted into nursing last year and approximately 67 of those students chose to come to UMASS.
- Journalism and Communications appear to be recession proof. They have been the biggest beneficiaries of the Amherst 250 plan (Brian).
 - Digital journalism and sports journalism seem to be taking off.
 - Students are most often interested in the applied aspects of communications and mass communications. However, the communications major and coursework within the major are not focused on mass communications. This is frequently a disappointment among students. Those interested in mass communications are encouraged to get involved with campus media such as The Daily Collegian, etc.
- The university is also seeing growth among students who desire to study biology, Chemistry, and Kinesiology. The growth and popularity of Biology is especially notable. Students are also showing an interest in International Relations. Conversely, Agriculture tends to be waning and at the bottom in terms of choice of major.
- We are currently enrolling approximately 4,200 freshmen.
 - The number of students applying under early action has increased from 4,900 to 6,000 over the past year.
 - The university acceptance rate has been going down over the past three years from 82% in 2005, 71% in 2006, to 65% in 2007.
 - We lose approximately 16% of the freshman class each year, 2/3 due to academic trouble (Brian).

**Summary of Discussion with Pamela Marsh-Williams and John Cunningham
January 15, 2008**

- Students enter the university expecting a lot of choice and access to a variety of programs. Often there is a disconnect between what students expect, their capabilities, and the availability of courses and majors they seek.
 - Business is the most sought after discipline but difficult to get into. Advisors try to steer students who can't get in into business to economics or resource economics. It is difficult to persuade students of the value and appeal of these alternative programs. In addition, these programs are becoming saturated.
 - Engineering and computer science have the capacity to handle more students but students may not have the academic credentials to succeed in the major (in the case of engineering) or may have misconceptions of the major and career options (in the case of computer science). Computer science is trying to present the major in such a way as to attract new students and break down stereotypes and may benefit by providing advisors with this information.

- We have three kinds of applicants: 1) Those who want to go to a state university, 2) those selecting the best school that has the programs they want that they can get into, and 3) a large group of well prepared students who select by institutional characteristics rather than specific programs.

- To what degree can admissions and advising shift demand that is out of sync? Admissions has a limited opportunity to make connections with students. It tends to be more of a sorting operation with limited recruiting.

- High school seniors don't tend to understand the career options that are available to them. UMASS could benefit by providing students with information about potential career paths for various majors. Parents want advisors to have access to someone in a department who can speak to students about majors and career options during the advising process. This presents a difficult dilemma for advising. In addition, advisors must find alternative courses for students when the courses they seek are filled to capacity.

- Students seek personal interaction with departments and their faculty. Departments should consider promoting their major and career options to students. Music makes contact with high school students and recruits them to come to UMASS. Under enrolled departments such as Computer Science and Engineering should consider making personal connections with students in order to attract majors. Departments might be given incentives by the administration to recruit.

- The University is filled to capacity with 19,000 students. Our large classrooms are fully scheduled throughout the day. Additional classrooms with 75-100 seats are needed (such as SOM 108).

- Capacity in courses is not necessarily linked to what students want. PeopleSoft does not allow us to determine students demand, only confirmed registration. John Cunningham is often in a position to try to add sections and hire adjuncts to meet student demand, along with the other Deans. We have more difficulty attracting the best students when our students go back and say that they can't get the courses they need. Our reputation suffers. How can we make sure that students get the seats in courses they need? Can we identify the top courses in demand? Can we consider different types of solutions? What is the vision for instructional space? Is there residential life space that can be scheduled and equipped with instructional technology? Can classes be spread out throughout the day and into the evening? Can we devise a plan to allocate available seats so that those in a major have first priority? Can Gen. Ed. requirements and the courses that fulfill them be adjusted to better align supply and demand?
- Twelve years ago, 66% of instruction was delivered by tenure track faculty. This compares with 52% of instruction today. Should additional resources be allocated to hire part-time instructors? Can resources be shifted to meet demand?
- Deans in SBS, NSM, and SOM may offer additional insights regarding supply and demand issues within their respective colleges.

**Summary of Discussion with Dean Janet Rifkin and Karen Schonenberg
February 19, 2008**

- SBS has 5500 students and it is a challenge to meet the needs of those students in a quality way. SBS has become overenrolled as more students have entered UMASS.
 - In senior surveys, student satisfaction is lowest for students in the biggest majors who must take a significant number of their classes in a large class format.
 - The availability of classroom space is a problem. More large and mid-sized auditoriums are needed which would accommodate 75-150 students. Classrooms are available at 8:00 a.m. but student attendance at that time is a problem. Evening classes may be better attended.
 - Advising is also problematic and a challenge. In a small major like Anthropology (with 120 majors), every faculty member has students to advise. In large majors like psychology and sociology, there is a core group of advisors, headed by a chief advisor, that includes staff and peer advisors. Students are seeking advice not only on classes but on life, their education, and career opportunities. The latter type of advice is not easily provided by staff and peer advisors. Faculty and departments are often in the best position to provide this type of advice.
 - Students who participate in the RAP/TAP programs have the highest satisfaction. These programs offer a sense of community where students can get to know one another and professors teach some courses in the residence halls.

- Some majors in SBS are overloaded not because students initially chose that major but because they ended up there while other majors accommodate a large service load or are open majors.
 - Students majoring in Sociology frequently move in from other majors in which they experienced difficulty such as Engineering and Psychology. Sociology is an open major.
 - Many students majoring in Economics would have preferred to be in the School of Management. In addition, Economics is increasingly being sought as a minor. Intermediate economics courses are in high demand and the department has difficulty staffing courses for their own majors.
 - Anthropology is a small major but has a heavy service load with courses meeting the general education requirement.
 - Communications and Journalism are restricted majors with 800 and 400 students, respectively. They are heavily staffed by lecturers and part-timers. Students are turned away and end up in other disciplines. Journalism is able to offer small classes and has the highest satisfaction. Demand for journalism is fierce and high. Communications courses are offered in a large lecture format without discussion sections. Sut Jhally has been successful in accommodating a large number of students while gaining high satisfaction ratings. His lectures are recorded and offered to students in an online course format as well. Approximately 1,000 students take his course each semester, and half take it online.

- Psychology is an open major and has 1,600 majors, the largest number on campus. They have grown from 1,100 to 1,600 over the past two years. The department does not have enough faculty relative to student demand.
- Statistics and methods courses are prerequisites for psychology, sociology, economics, and anthropology and this has become an issue. These courses are often a challenge to pass and many students must repeat the courses a second time. Courses are taught in computer labs and space has become a problem. They are looking at the possibility of offering more online courses for day students. Another possibility is offering sections for students with laptop computers, although space would be needed for laptop classes, which includes furniture and wireless capability.
- Potential solutions to some of these issues were offered.
 - Consider strategic recruiting to direct students where capacity exists (such as in political science). Those who declare a major early finish in a more timely fashion.
 - Concentrate on the first year experience within majors (i.e. success of the TAP/RAP programs).
 - Offer workshops on how to succeed in small and large classes.
 - Translate the UMASS experience to the workplace including career counseling, etc.
 - Add mid-sized and large auditoriums to accommodate 200 and 300 level courses.
 - Fund innovative strategies related to curriculum, multiple platforms, etc.
 - Hire more Ph.D. lecturers who have advising and teaching roles.
 - Collaborate more with admissions to provide major and career information to students, recruit students in particular majors, etc. so that the information conveyed is accurate and useful to students.
 - Departments and schools can develop promotional literature about their major, career opportunities, etc. and post on their website as well. They might offer student workshops, profile successful alums, have alums back to campus to speak with students, develop podcasts, and send out emails from the department on how students can make the most of their education. These initiatives would help in the advising process.