

Address by Ian McCaw, Athletic Director to the Faculty Senate October 3, 2002.

First of all, thank you for inviting me. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to come before the Senate so early on in my tenure here at the University of Massachusetts, and I'm certainly looking forward to having a very strong and open relationship with the faculty in general and certainly with this body. So, I'm delighted to be here with you.

I thought I would touch upon three areas that I hope are of mutual interest today-- academic performance of our student athletes, the vision that we have for the Athletic Program moving forward, and some of my initial thoughts as to what some of the opportunities and challenges are that we're going to face as an athletic program moving forward. To begin with, I'll share with you what I think is very good news: Each year, at about this time, the NCAA releases graduation rate data. The graduation rate for the student athlete population here is 71%. That's based on the '95-'96 cohort. That number compares favorably with the national average for student athletes, which stands at 60%. The graduation for the general student population here at the University of Massachusetts is 59%. Overall, our student athletes are doing very well compared with their peers on campus, as well as with other student athletes around the country. So we're pleased with those numbers. Our mean GPA for student athletes stands at 2.84, which is comparable with the general student population at the University. This past spring, 170 of our student population, which numbers about 700, posted a 3.5 or greater GPA, which is Dean's List standards. Overall, I'm very satisfied and very pleased with what our student athletes are doing in the classroom, but we'll do everything we can to move those numbers forward in the years to come.

I'd like to talk about our vision for the Athletic Program moving forward. We're beginning the development of a strategic plan for athletics right now. Over the course of this year, we'll develop that plan, but there will be five strategic goals that will be the centerpiece of that plan. I'd like to share those with you now. Our first goal is to ensure that we provide our student athletes with a very high-quality experience academically, athletically, and in terms of their personal development. Our coaches are charged with going out and trying to recruit the very best and brightest student athletes they possibly can. But once we get them on campus, we have a lot of folks involved in different capacities to try to enhance their experience and help them develop to meet their full potential. Obviously, from an athletic standpoint, most of that responsibility falls upon our coaches to help them become bigger and stronger and faster and more skilled in their particular sport. Academically, that falls upon our faculty, the advisors in the academic community and also our academic support staff within the athletic department. They'll provide study hall support, tutoring when necessary and mentoring. We spend a lot of time working on time management with our student athletes, test-taking skills and so forth. So we do an awful lot of work behind the scenes with our student athletes to help them reach their full academic potential. We've also recently introduced the NCAA Life Skills program here at the University. That's an area to help foster development on the part of our student athletes in the areas of leadership, opportunities for them to get out in the community and participate in community service and outreach, and help them develop some career skills as they go out into the professional world. It's a three-pronged approach: athletics, academics, and personal development, and we'll work very hard to try to help our student athletes reach their full potential.

The second goal we have really centers on winning. Athletics is a very competitive arena, and we want to achieve competitive success in all of our programs. The essence of

athletics is winning: having competitive success. We want to win championships at the conference level, we want to win nationally, we want to have teams advance to NCAA competition. So, we're going to build in those types of goals for each one of those sports programs through this strategic plan.

The third area is the area of revenue enhancement. That encompasses fundraising, generating corporate sponsorship support, ticket sales, merchandise and licensing. All the areas that can generate revenue. We certainly recognize that the state and this institution cannot foot the bill for this athletic program, so we need to go out and generate dollars on our own. We're very committed to that and I believe we're going to have a lot of success doing that.

The fourth goal that we have is to maintain an environment that promotes equity, diversity, good sporting conduct and rules compliance. Those are our values, if you will. We're going to provide proportion opportunities for men and women within the athletic program. We're going to have a staff and a student athlete population that will be much more diverse. We're going to ensure that our student athletes and coaches maintain good sporting conduct at all times, and we're going to follow the NCAA rules. That's just a very baseline foundational approach as to how we're going to govern and operate our athletic program.

The fifth goal is to provide very high-quality leadership and management for our program. There's a lot of athletics that goes on behind the scenes. We need to have a very good business plan. We need to have a vision for where we want to take this Athletic Program, and we need to make very good business decisions if we're going to reach our full potential. That's very much a part of what we're also going to incorporate into our strategic plan. So that may give you a sense of the direction that we want to move this Athletic Program into the future.

I'm very excited about some of the pieces of the Athletic Department that we have in place. First and foremost, it's very clear to me that we have a great institution. We have a tremendous regional and national reputation as a university. That's something that allows the Athletic Program to move forward very quickly and to build upon, and I'm excited about the quality of our faculty, of our students, the quality of staff and student athletes. We have a lot to work with, and we really have an excellent core product to sell as we go out and try to recruit the best and brightest student athletes to the University. I'm very excited about our leadership. Having an opportunity to work with Chancellor Lombardi and spend some time with him early on, he's going to bring tremendous vision and energy to this institution. He is a chancellor and a leader who has a tremendous reputation nationally, I think, as one of the top CEO's in American higher education. He is someone who really understands the symbiotic relationship between athletics and academics: that having a high-quality athletic program provides tremendous benefits to academia, tremendous benefits to the institution in terms of development, alumni relations, institutional marketing, building school spirit, and really creating a very high-quality student life here. So I'm very excited about working with him and the leadership that he's going to bring to the institution and to the Athletic Program.

We have a great athletic tradition at UMass. We've won national championships. We've won an awful lot of conference championships. We've regularly advanced to NCAA tournament play. We've proven that we can be successful in athletics here. We haven't done it consistently, and that's something that we're going to do in years to come, but we've had success here periodically in the past. That's something that we're committed to building upon and enhancing in the years to come. We have a lot of assets and pieces in place, but I'm not naïve enough to believe that we don't have some challenges, and assessing our department, it's very clear to me that we have a lot of work to do. We're going to get very serious about doing that work as we

move forward. I'm a firm believer that we have a lot of good things in place, but we also have a lot of pieces missing and a lot of things we need to get working on. We'll be doing that over the course of this year and in the years to come. Our department is also very much reeling, quite honestly, from the seven sports that were eliminated last year. That's left some scars and caused some aftershocks. That's something that we've also been dealing with in the early days here, but will be something that we'll be able to overcome. I think the biggest challenge we face is in getting our revenue-producing sports winning. We haven't done real well in the revenue-producing sports in the last couple of years. Our ability to be successful is driven in large part by the high-profile revenue-producing sports, because if they're achieving success, it's going to help us generate more dollars from a fund-raising standpoint. It's going to increase the value of our corporate sponsorship opportunities. It's going to allow us to sell more tickets, which in turn is going to make our whole engine move a lot more swiftly. So those are some of the challenges and opportunities I see as we get to work here within the Athletic Program.