

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AT AMHERST
OFFICE OF THE FACULTY SENATE

From the 639th meeting of the Faculty Senate held on March 24, 2005.

ADDRESS BY CHANCELLOR JOHN V. LOMBARDI

Thank you very much. As you know, we have been in a long and interesting process to try and address a number of very serious and important issues that have faced this campus for a very long time and continue to face it. In that process, we laid out a path that we would follow to try and improve the campus climate; improve the way in which we deal with diversity on this campus; improve the mechanisms of support that we have for a wide variety of important programs of teaching and programs of student support, important programs for the recruitment and retention of students, important programs for the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff.

Now we asked that a Commission come and be formed to provide us with some outside advice. That Commission was formed, as we had identified it should be, with outstanding members on it both from inside and outside the University. They set a set of ground rules, which they followed effectively throughout the period of their discussion. I stayed away from that discussion as I promised I would; had no involvement in the conversation. At the end of the day, the Commission published a very, very helpful report which included two main parts. One part was composed of a summary of the key points and the discussions that took place which were quite extensive, materials that had been presented by various people with an interest in this campus—both on and off the campus. Then they presented a series of recommendations to the campus that we should consider to try and improve the way in which this campus functions in relation to diversity.

We took those suggestions and we put together a draft of a proposal as we had promised everybody we would do. We produced it very quickly and put it up on a web site with a period of comment and discussion as we said we would. The purpose of that period of comment and discussion is precisely to have comment and discussion. The proposal is exactly what it says; it is a proposal and, consequently, while people have asked me to defend the proposal as if it were a plan, it is not a plan to be defended. It is a proposal to be responded to by all of those who have an interest, who have expertise, who have commitment and want to propose alternatives. In the time that that proposal has been up on the web site, I have received a large number of communications. Some of them short and pithy, some of them longer, more thoughtful, carefully constructed to provide alternative ways at resolving the kinds of issues that were raised by the Commission.

There are a couple of clarifications that I should make at this time. One of them is that, as some of you will remember who have followed the course of this conversation since we founded the Commission, we recommended and we set up the Commission so that it would provide recommendations to the campus: not that they would design a plan, not that they would take responsibility for the work that we must do ourselves, but that they would provide us recommendations. At the time, I expressed the thought and indeed the conviction that it was likely we would have some recommendations we would be unable to implement, either because the recommendations would be wise, appropriate and effective, but illegal in our context—I have discovered that we have quite a complicated context—or that they would require an investment of funds beyond our capacity to provide at this time. We are working our way through this process. We are delighted at the amount of interest, the commitment and energy that is being focused on these issues and we are eager to have the kind of suggestions, comments, and ideas that everybody can provide us in this comment period. I am here along with everybody else in our administration and our faculty to have those suggestions so that we can incorporate them into whatever it is that we can design for a final plan to be posted on the web site, according to the schedule that we promised everybody that we would.