

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
OFFICE OF THE FACULTY SENATE

From the 671st Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate held on March 13, 2008

PRESENTATION BY CHARLENA SEYMOUR, PROVOST AND SENIOR VICE
CHANCELLOR FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND BRYAN HARVEY, ASSOCIATE
PROVOST FOR ACADEMIC PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT
“PREPARING FOR THE NEASC RE-ACCREDITATION SELF-STUDY”

A PDF version of the PowerPoint presentation is available at:
http://www.umass.edu/senate/fs/minutes/2007-2008/seymour_harvey_powerpoint_671_3-13-08.pdf

Charlena Seymour, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

There are two parts to our presentation today. I am going to provide an overview of these two giant processes that face us. Bryan Harvey will provide a more in-depth description of the activities that are going to be involved in those processes.

It is important to have a dialogue and to set the tone about these two major evaluations that the campus is required to do. One of the projects is going to deal with accreditation which is a national mandate relating to maintaining a set of standards, and it will involve self-study, benchmarking, assessment and outcomes. The other, the strategic plan, is required. Even if it were not a requirement, it is something that we should do to develop and implement a vision for the campus. It gives us an opportunity to think about what we want to accomplish in the next five years. Both of these evaluations are going to deal with faculty, facilities, students, and funds.

How can we put these two processes together to meet one purpose? First, we want to bring attention to the process and think about key issues at the department and campus level. Some deans have already undertaken vision exercises. Some are further ahead than others. But, all of them have been thinking about it.

As we undertake these big initiatives, we want to think about what we have learned from the past. We want to think about how we can work together, minimize the work, and use a lot of the reports, self-studies, reaccreditation activities, hiring plans, capital plans, and former strategic plans. In reality, many of the structures and processes will be the same.

There are other lessons to think about. First, the Provost's Office has volunteered to be the communications central. We will own the website, which will be the key to communicating all aspects of the accreditation and strategic plan to the campus. Secondly, we are trying to include action and follow-up plans. We are asking that there be action items and timelines associated with all of these plans, whether it is an accreditation, campus, department, or a school-college plan.

We want to begin telling the story, sharing a common vocabulary, and focusing our hearts and minds on these issues. You have probably heard some of these mantras before, but they work. For example, we all teased about “blurring the boundaries,” but it had a very good underpinning to it. We should collaborate and work more closely, both within and outside our departments. I am sure we know about: “money matters,” “time is the enemy,” and “performance counts.” These things stick to us; we rally around them. We need to think about how to talk about ourselves to various audiences. We also need to secure endorsements for these projects, both internally and externally. This is a progressive and futuristic activity, particularly with regards to the strategic plan.

Not only do we want the plans to help the new chancellor, but we also want these plans to help the campus in different venues. There are lots of people who understand strategic plans and accreditation. It resonates with them, so when we come forward with a strategic plan and talk about accreditation and standards for quality, people will pay attention. It is also important because, as we

go through these exercises, it gives us a chance to get to know each other better. Those who have wounds and scars from previous ones may be somewhat hesitant to get involved again, but we need your experience. More importantly, we are going to have one voice when we talk to various constituents.

Whenever external reviewers come to the campus, especially for AQADs and accreditations, I speak with the Dean and the Chair of the department. The first question I ask is “has the faculty read this report?” It is going to be extremely important that we can say that the faculty have read and endorsed it. We need to use these plans to address criticisms, whether they be constructive or negative. We need to think about perceptions. These plans will enable us to provide data, stories, and information to offset, and in some instances, increase perceptions that different groups have about our behavior.

The overarching principal of this plan will probably glue it all together. It revolves around our identity as the flagship. We have had a lot of discussions about the flagship challenge. For today’s meeting, I have received feedback from all of the academic deans and other members of the Dean’s Council. I have received feedback from the Research Council. From the information that we have gathered so far, certain themes rise to the top. People are thinking about the historical context. We know that the Morrill Act and other types of legislation have either implicitly or explicitly described us as the flagship in this system. We have demonstrated leadership and excellence in research, teaching, service, outreach, and that is demonstrated through the many awards, grants and other types of external accolades that our campus and faculty have accomplished. We are classified as a Carnegie Research Intensive/Extensive institution, the highest level of productivity with regards to our accomplishments. There is an expectation for our involvement in different activities at the local, national, and international level. People call on us not only because we are the flagship in name, but because we do what a flagship does.

As we pull ourselves together and get down to work, we are going to have many campus conversations, defining and refining the processes. We will be assigning duties. Volunteers are always welcome. There will be a process in terms of how people get involved and how people will be more involved than others. It is going to be extremely important that we manage timelines and expectations for implementations. We cannot stop because of breaks or the summer. We are working on this project as we speak, so we need people who will be willing to at least talk to us over the telephone over these breaks.

We want to build in flexibility. In terms of feedback or assessment, we may find we are taking the wrong direction, and so we will need to turn around and start over. It is probably better to review what we are doing and take a different step as opposed to continuing down the wrong path. Finally, we are moving forward. The train is at the station. It is about to leave, and we would like to have everyone here aboard.

Bryan Harvey, Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment

I am just going to walk through how this is going to lay itself out. There is a lot of activity coming together at the same time, but the good news is it builds upon work that has already been done on campus.

Just to review, we had our last reaccreditation visit in the fall of 1998. We were scheduled for a revisit in the fall of 2008. At the time we were planning this, there were a couple of things happening on campus. Chancellor Lombardi was leaving; there were a lot of issues up in the air. A request was made to NEASC to postpone for a year, which they agreed to do. Now we expect the team here in November of 2009, which is not a long way away to get this kind of thing going. The requirements are: first, we have to do an institutional self-study. NEASC is one of the six regional accrediting bodies the Federal Government recognizes. They have eleven standards, 172 topics that we have to address within those. In fact, you can see how they are organized in that long, indecipherable piece of paper that was in the back of the room. If you go to the website, which is listed on the bottom of the

page, you can see what the actual standards are for each of those numbers. It also requires broad engagement in the campus community. It is a very open and transparent process, so this is one of many meetings which will occur, talking about the process and also about the content as we go forward. We are working with OIT to put up an interactive website that can help manage the whole process for the campus, so we will hear a lot more about it as we go forward.

The accreditation process also requires a campus visit from an external team of experts. For an institution like this, they typically try to find people who are of this species. They try to find a president of a flagship, public institution. They try to find vice presidents of administration and finance from this kind of a place to serve on the team. At the end of that process, they issue a comprehensive statement on our situation and prospects.

Here is the frame of reference for all this. The teams start by looking at the previous accreditation process to see what was said and what has happened in the interim. Because this happens once every ten years, frequently there are changes in the standards themselves. Recently, there has been a lot of change not only on the part of our accrediting body, but also on the part of all the regional accrediting bodies. The environment has been changing. That affects what we have to respond to. Of course, we also bring our own issues.

If you look back at the previous accreditation study, there were four issues that the team identified as requiring additional attention by the institution. We are required to submit a five-year report on those, indicating what we were doing. The topics were: campus/system governance relationships; assessment of student learning outcomes; library collections, staffing and facilities; and deferred maintenance and infrastructure needs. Those seem to still be in play, but things have happened in the intervening years.

In terms of governance, ten years ago the team noted the need to evaluate the effectiveness of governance relationships between the Trustees and the University, particularly as it affects the flagship status. That was a hot topic even then. Five years ago, in our interim report, the campus said: whatever previous concerns may have existed about the status of the campus, these no longer exist, and the campus is fully satisfied with the autonomy and authority that the President and Trustees have provided.

Student outcomes assessment has been a theme for a long time with both this body and the other accrediting agencies. Their concern ten years ago was that we needed to develop direct measures of student learning in both general education and in the major. Importantly, we needed to systematically apply that to decision making planning at the institution. What we said five years ago was that we developed one of the most extensive student assessment programs in the Northeast, which was true. We also said that we continue our efforts to imbed assessment into the institutional culture, which indicated we would try harder to show direct outcomes.

In terms of the library, they observed that we have not been able to keep pace with the demands to meet the challenges required of a research library. Five years ago we agreed, stating: campus plans to increase support for the library were profoundly undercut by the decline and elimination of direct state library support. As a result, neither collection development nor staffing have increased. At that point, we said: the campus in general assumes that the library will have the opportunity to rebuild in coming years. This is obviously a problem that has continued throughout the entire period, which will certainly be a topic of discussion when the team comes again.

Ten years ago, there was serious concern regarding the suitability and adequacy of our facilities. They noted meager state support and also the failure to provide us with the kind of management oversight we need for efficiency and prompt response. Of course, five years ago, we were doing a lot to address this issue. We said: while much remains to be done, the past five years have clearly shown the campus taking major steps. Many of the presentations we have had in this room in previous months indicate that this is a problem that, if anything, will become more important to the future success of the campus.

So, there are no surprises. If you look backwards, we talked about the same things then that we are talking about now.

One thing that was not singled out as a topic ten years ago was the question of faculty. While we had some loss of faculty as a result of early budget cuts, we had not yet reached the depth of loss in more recent years. But, even tens years ago, the team observed that early retirement has transferred significant portions of teaching and service onto the remaining faculty members, and the campus needs to re-equilibrate its faculty resources. Even then, they were seeing the problems that were coming from random attrition. Five years ago, we observed that two additional early retirement programs and limited faculty hiring have had their impact, resulting in a loss of over 100 faculty. Five years ago, the problem was becoming apparent. This time, we are going to have to focus a great deal on what we are doing about it.

There have also been some changing expectations from the accreditors. They revised the accrediting standards of 2006, and new emphases include: a sharper focus on mission and governance. They are not only asking, do you have a clear mission, but do you have your governance relationships clear so that people are able to act in an effective way? They are very much concerned with capacity. This is especially true for institutions that are trying to expand into new markets, going into online and foreign locations. The accrediting bodies are increasingly eager to have you demonstrate that you have the capacity to do that without compromising quality.

There are three pages about increased, more specific expectations. They are continuing to hammer underneath for direct outcomes assessment, talking about a whole culture of evidence that the institution can demonstrate. They ask that the institution take all the information it has and apply it to decision making.

There is lots of stuff about accountability to stakeholders, largely a consequence of external expectations that have been shifting in the world. If you have been following the news regarding the Spellings Report and the showdown between members of Congress and the regional accrediting bodies, there is tremendous pressure to talk about what really happens and what value students get for their money. Then, of course, the institutional issues that we bring to this are faculty renewal and all the work done on Amherst 250 around instructional needs and research opportunities. Facilities improvement is a big topic because of the challenges of our self-funding strategy. Also, now that there appears to be a prospect for substantial new state investment from the Higher Education Capital Bond Bill and the Life Sciences Initiative, how do we deal with that? How do we plan for it?

Then, there is a lot of activity around the first-year student experience, partly driven by concerns over retention and student performance in the first year. We have had a First-Year Experience Task Force, looking at advising and early success. The current General Education Task Force is looking at what happens with the student educational experience in that critical first year. Both of these things increasingly impact our admissions competitiveness. We are about to enter a period of demographic decline in the population of college-going students in our area. Competition among institutions is becoming extremely intense. Our position in the marketplace is softening. It will be very important to talk about what product we are making available to students, hopefully influencing their choices.

We have to make a choice about how we want to approach our self-study. The traditional way is to do a standard-by-standard self-study where you take that list and you just march through it. You get people together and answer questions until you get to the end. Sometimes that is good, but they also offer the opportunity to do a self-study with areas of emphasis. They recommend this approach for institutions that have a set of salient and challenging issues that warrant intensive examination. They also recommend this approach when the timing is right to organize the self-study around a set of issues. It certainly seemed to us that the kinds of issues we have been talking about fit this standard very well. We have been looking at how to put together this self-study process around this areas of emphasis approach. The question is: how do you do that?

There is the answer (referring to slides). It is the F/F³ formula. As Charlena pointed out, the flagship challenge has to be over everything because it defines our purposes, shows the way we relate to the rest of the world, and describes our relationship with the Trustees. We felt it was very important to make sure that no matter what happens in that self-study, the flagship challenge is what orients and organizes everything. Understanding that has to mean something. What does that flagship status imply? Where do we stand in terms of meeting those expectations? What does it take for us to fulfill that role? Then, looking at F1, F2 and 3, these are the kinds of things that really express our flagship status. If you do not have the faculty in number, orientation, and organization, how are you going to have the ability to meet those expectations?

Each of us has stories about how facilities are interfering with our ability to do what people want us to do. That first-year student experience brings together a lot of issues about how we interact with students, their families, and the expectations of society. While these are not the only topics that are important, the idea is that, to tell the story, we need to know the chapter headings. This is the current state of thinking.

This could have been the end of the presentation up until a few weeks ago. More recently, this flagship question has been engaged by the Trustees and by the Chancellor's Search Committee, and so we are trying to figure out how to respond to that. At the same time, we are organizing the self-study process. It seems like a great opportunity to bring those things together. As Charlena pointed out, the campus needed some clear planning activity in any event. We have the end of Amherst 250 in sight. Pretty soon we have to think about what comes next. Obviously, we need a number of programmatic decisions to drive capital planning, and all these enrollment challenges require very careful thought and coordination.

The resolution the Trustees appear ready to adopt on the 19th calls for this campus to be a strong and nationally-recognized flagship. The Board is committing itself to moving UMass Amherst into the top tier of public universities and charging the campus to develop the outline of a strategic plan that the new Chancellor will direct. That is a big change in the kind of expectations placed upon us. This is requested in a short order by July of this year. So, how do you make all of this fit together?

If you take these and put them together, it looks something like the following: first to focus on that definition of flagship. We have to add a little definition to what that means. Who are the flagships? What distinguishes them from other institutions? Then, where does UMass Amherst stand when you look at resources, faculty, students, research impact, reputation, and the kinds of things that people have in their heads when they think about institutions in American public higher education. If we are supposed to be a member of this fairly small set of institutions, where are we in that family? We have a lot of information available, collected nationally, for example, by *U.S. News*. They collect a great deal of information about faculty resources and student profile. The Center, John Lombardi's organization, does an excellent job of getting information about 9-10 very important components of research productivity, faculty awards and so forth. The NRC rankings of graduate programs will be available some day and will provide a great deal of insight into where we stand in this specialized group of institutions.

With that as a reality check, what are the strategies that are going to be important to letting us move forward? I think it is understood that we are not going to appear at the top of the list of American flagships. What will it take to move forward? How do we organize at the college and school level to respond to these kinds of larger institutional strategies? In terms of next steps in the reaccreditation side, we need to finalize this plan and consult with NEASC. They have to approve the approach we take. We have to organize the self-study. Part of that involves being clear about the relationship between the standards and these emphasis areas. That large sheet you have is just an illustration of how that works. What we did is go through each of those 172 topics and looked at them in light of faculty renewal, facilities, and the first-year experience. If it has one box, that means there is some overlap. If it has two boxes, that means there is quite a bit of overlap. If it has three boxes, that means it is really a central question. That just gives you a little roadmap as to how these big themes interact with the standards.

There is the Steering Committee to organize. We have had a working group involving Martha Stassen and myself. Marilyn Blaustein and Jim Leheny, who had been in charge of the accreditation relationship for years, are continuing to participate as a post-retirement activity. We are talking about an external advisory committee. There is a lot of interest on the part of the UMass Amherst Foundation. Some of the school and college advisory groups want to harness that and bring it into the process. Then, there will need to be working groups for each of the emphasis areas and standards. Figuring out how to make all of that work will be very important. We also have to engage the community. As I said, this will be one of many meetings we have, getting the message across as to what we are trying to accomplish. We also want to enlist other people's feedback and contributions. It is easy to pose these questions. It is not easy to figure out what to do. This is going to be a very interactive and participatory process.

In terms of the strategic plan, we do not have a lot of time. This is supposed to be able to go through the Trustee Committee process in time for July. So far, we have been working with the Rules Committee to figure out what makes sense in the time we have available. We have been trying to put together an outline that is consistent with the ideas we are lining up for the reaccreditation process but also salient to that expectation on the part of the Trustees.