Academic Priorities Council
Minutes
December 18, 2008

Attending: Margaret Allard, Matteo Pangallo, Scott Stangroom, Carolyn Cave, Richard Bogartz, Ernie May, Randall Knoper, Hin Fai Cheung, Eliot Moss, Dayo Gore, W. Curt Conner, Bryan Harvey, Kathy Debevec (Chair)

The meeting was devoted to a discussion of the current budget situation. Ernie May indicated that a $38 million cut is anticipated for FY’10 (this was more recently changed to a $45 million cut as of 1/27/09). It is expected that half of the cut will be accomplished through reductions in spending and half will be resolved through increased revenue, much in the form of fee increases. On the expenditure side, campus units were asked for their plans for 3%, 6%, and 9% cuts. A 9% cut is being administered now. Wilson says that we can get through this without hurting the quality of education, but it is felt that the best we can do is stabilize enrollment and avoid a downward spiral.

Two-thirds of funds are in schools and colleges. Non-academic units are being taxed more now. Merging colleges is viewed as a way to save money. In terms of fee increases, the trustees have offered guidelines for fee increases between 3 and 17%. The goal is to secure these increases while holding high and medium need students harmless.

Next semester, this council will consider restructuring proposals. The administration is looking at restructuring as a means to reduce administrative expenses. The Faculty Senate has always commented on consolidating programs, mergers, and academic degree programs. The APC is likely to prepare a report on structural changes and mergers.

The effect of budget cuts on student perceptions of the University is of concern. Brian Harvey discussed some of his findings from the recent Admitted Students Questionnaire. The questionnaire assesses perceptions of UMass relative to its competitors and relative to what students are seeking in a college. UMass is generally perceived as “fun”, a “party school”, a “back up school”, and a “good value”. The January issue of Smart Money ranks schools by return on investment in terms of the earnings of its graduates. UMass did well with a ranking of #18. Students indicate that cost is important to them. They seek value and we perform well on this dimension. Students’ perception is that UMass is not expensive, particularly in comparison to the private colleges in New England. UMass’ closest competitors include UNH, UVM, BU, UConn, and Northeastern. UConn has been coming up in the rankings. Many of UMass’ direct competitors are perceived much more favorably on the quality of the programs, the quality of the faculty, academic reputation, etc. even though UMass is comparable, if not superior on these dimensions.