Preliminary draft

This Self-Study is in the form of a preliminary draft, leading toward a final draft in late August. This material will continue to undergo editing; editing might be extensive in some sections. Comments and feedback are welcome.

Standard One: Mission and Purposes

I. Institutional History

The University of Massachusetts Amherst, the flagship campus of a five-campus public university system, was founded in 1863 as a consequence of the Morrill Land Grant Act. As a land-grant university, UMass Amherst’s mission is to provide teaching, research and public service to the nation as a whole and to the citizens of Massachusetts in particular. This mission, as interpreted to address the challenges of the 21st century, remains as true today as it was when the institution opened its doors as the Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1867.

In 2007, UMass Amherst celebrated its 60th anniversary as a university. In 1947, with an increased enrollment of returning World War II veterans and the need to provide many of them with education in engineering and business, the Massachusetts State College, as it had been called since 1931, expanded its curriculum to offer more courses in both professional programs and in liberal arts and sciences. It received permission from state authorities to change its name to the University of Massachusetts to more accurately reflect what the institution had become. In 1962, the University was granted fiscal autonomy by the state legislature and major infusions of state support in the following decade allowed the campus to grow from 7,676 students in 1962 to more than 24,000 full-time equivalent students in fall 2008.

Degrees are now awarded in six associate, 88 baccalaureate, 73 master’s and 53 doctoral programs. UMass Amherst is the only public institution in Massachusetts with a designation from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for “very high research activity.” The Carnegie Foundation also has awarded the campus its Community Engagement classification. UMass Amherst’s aspiration to achieve excellence in teaching, research and public service is consistent with its history, and this history informs every planning exercise the campus undertakes.

The University System

In 1965, the University’s second campus opened in downtown Boston, then expanded to the Harbor Campus in 1974. A third campus, the UMass Medical Center in Worcester, was founded in 1962 and enrolled its first medical students in 1970. That same year, the President’s Office moved from the Amherst campus to offices in Boston, and a Chancellor’s Office was established as the principal administrative position on each of the three campuses.

In 1989, the Board of Trustees created a Commission on the Future of the University and appointed David S. Saxon, President Emeritus of the University of California, as its Chair. The Commission’s report called for the consolidation of all five public university campuses in Massachusetts – the three UMass campuses plus the University of Lowell and Southeastern
Massachusetts University – into a single university sector with an autonomous board. In 1991, Governor William Weld signed legislation creating the new five-campus University of Massachusetts as it exists today with a single President and Board of Trustees.

University Mission

The most recent Mission Statement for the University system, approved by its Board of Trustees in 2005, is as follows:

“To provide an affordable and accessible education of high quality and to conduct programs of research and public service that advance knowledge and improve the lives of the people of the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world” (University Mission Statement).  

At the same time, the Board of Trustees reaffirmed 10 strategic priorities related to that mission:

- Maintain and improve affordability and access
- Enhance the student learning experience
- Strengthen the University’s research and development enterprise
- Continue a focus on diversity and positive climate
- Renew the faculty
- Increase the endowment
- Develop first-rate infrastructure
- Develop a leadership role in public service
- Improve the delivery of administrative and IT services
- Position the University effectively in the higher education marketplace

Campus Mission

In March 2008, the Board of Trustees reaffirmed a more focused mission for the Amherst campus, describing it as the system’s “flagship campus” and acknowledging that “a strong and nationally recognized flagship is essential to the success of the system as a whole.” The Trustees committed “to moving UMass Amherst into the top tier of public universities in the country.” Further, the Board instructed the Chancellor of the Amherst campus, in cooperation with the President, to prepare the outline of a campus strategic plan that would implement that goal (Board of Trustees Votes, March 19, 2008).

In remarks to a community group in February 2009, Chancellor Robert Holub succinctly stated the assumptions upon which he would build his outline for a strategic plan: “We will continue to give our highest priority to our core mission: the teaching of our undergraduate students; the training of graduate students for academic and professional careers; research and scholarly activity; and service and outreach to the citizenry in both western Massachusetts and the Commonwealth” (A Strategic Vision for UMass Amherst).
Chancellor Holub’s outline for a strategic plan, *A Framework for Excellence: The Flagship Report*, was published in spring 2009 for campus review. Its details are discussed fully in Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation, but it is worth noting here that the document opens with a reaffirmation of both the institution’s land-grant mission and its designation by the Trustees as the University’s flagship campus:

“The University of Massachusetts Amherst, the flagship campus of the University of Massachusetts, has a distinctive mission in the Commonwealth … It is the only public research institution that offers a combination of high quality undergraduate education, outstanding graduate education, and internationally recognized research … As the state’s land-grant campus, it has the responsibility to carry on programs around the state for the benefit of the citizenry and to maintain dynamic connections to communities across the state.”

**Appraisal and Projection**

The mission of UMass Amherst, as articulated by the Trustees and reiterated by the campus administration, is clear and has remained consistent with its founding principles of 1863. The mission is available on the University’s website and is accepted by its stakeholders. It has been reviewed and reaffirmed in the most recent transition of the campus’s leadership. The mission has been tested by time and has proven flexible enough to adapt to the changing circumstances of economic needs, demographic trends and resource availability.

The challenges of the current economic crisis pose yet one more test of the mission’s viability and appropriateness. While remaining affordable and accessible to the citizens it serves, will UMass Amherst have the needed resources to strengthen its teaching and research activities? Can it continue to provide a broad range of high quality public service to the state and, if so, at what cost? The economic realities that pose these challenges to the campus lie beyond the control of its leaders, yet past experience suggests that the institution has the will, the talent and the strength to meet such challenges.