Dear Faculty and Staff,

As many of you know, the campus is currently involved in developing a comprehensive strategic plan that will position us for success in the years ahead. The Joint Task Force on Strategic Oversight (JTFSO), consisting of faculty, staff and students appointed by the Faculty Senate and myself, leads the planning effort. As part of the strategic planning process, the Faculty Senate and the campus administration have launched a joint effort to review how resource allocation works on this campus.

One clear theme that has emerged from our planning discussions is that the need to use resources wisely — whether they are financial, physical or human — is increasingly important. Yet the system the campus uses to allocate resources is largely based on history, and history may not be a good guide as we move forward. As someone new to the campus I was curious to understand why resources are distributed as they are. Often during my first year I have come across situations where our goals and our resources do not appear to match up very well: departments asked to handle increases in enrollment without clear consideration of the availability of instructors; new research initiatives that overtax existing capacity (e.g., space); confusing incentives for innovation. Clearly, our budgeting system needs to be more effective in helping us meet our goals. And we are not alone: in recent years, many of our peers have transitioned from historical, incremental budgeting systems to more effective ones.

Just as we are working now through the strategic planning process to develop common goals, we ought to have a common understanding of how and why resources are distributed. There are many ways to do this, and efforts at some universities have not gone as well as planned. Our challenge is to find an approach that fits our campus culture and situation, with no preconceived ideas but with a strong commitment to understanding how our inherited system might be improved.

To lead the exploration, we have appointed a Joint Task Force on Resource Allocation (JTFRA), co-chaired by Dean Tim Anderson of the College of Engineering and Elizabeth Chilton, Professor of Anthropology and Associate Dean for Research in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. (The full membership and charge is found at http://www.umass.edu/senate/adhoc/jtfra_members.htm). JTFRA will explore approaches used at other institutions and they will imagine entirely new approaches. They will then recommend a resource allocation process that ensures transparency, rewards initiative, and reassures all of us that our resources and our intentions are aligned.

In the words of the overall strategic plan, the JTFRA will examine how the campus can set “high standards of transparency, rationality and fairness as we tackle difficult choices” through a budget process that fits the campus’s needs, values and culture.

The JTFRA will be reaching out to the campus in many ways for input, and your perspectives will be critical to the process. If you have any initial thoughts, you can share them with the JTFRA at jtfra@provost.umass.edu.

Thank you for your support and ongoing participation in the campus planning process.
Sincerely,

Kumble Subbaswamy
Chancellor