Preamble:  School/College Unit Planning

Flagship universities such as ours play a vital and distinctive role in higher education. We are committed to excellence in research, to the development of knowledge for the world and its communication to our professional peers and to public audiences who support our mission. Simultaneously, and equally important, we are responsible for and passionate about the vital role we play in educating our students at all levels. Further, with our land-grant heritage, we are also committed to serving society by applying the fruits of our research to improve the human condition.

These three missions are both fundamental and integrated. The research frontier infuses the classroom and invites citizens to examine critically and with due respect for our fundamental values, the social/cultural and natural world we inhabit. Equipping our graduate and undergraduate students with knowledge at the cutting edge, informed by the perspectives that emerge from the myriad forms of research we undertake, is part of what makes the flagship educational enterprise distinctive. Clearly, no meaningful outreach to society is possible without all of these elements and interaction with the world beyond our boundaries is integral to our mission of research and education in the public interest.

The role of unit planning: Parts 1 & 2

The third phase of the planning process brings our institution to the critical level of the departments and programs that provide for both research and teaching and must rise to the highest standards in both domains. There are two parts to this work. The first will give every department and college/school an opportunity to “take a look in the mirror” and assess departmental standing in their fields of expertise, the strengths and areas of improvement needed most immediately, especially with respect to undergraduate programs. This will require the analysis of data we will be providing to you as well as a good deal of self-reflection of a more qualitative nature.

The second part looks ahead and asks each unit to develop its ambitions for the long term future, to tackle hard questions about where research priorities lie, to plan for more sustained improvement in graduate education and to lay the groundwork for the development of resources to implement these ambitions. The Deans will be working with their colleagues to “roll up” these possibilities into a school wide (and in some instances inter-school) action plan that will be debated and refined in collaboration with the Provost’s office. The end result will be the commitment of resources at levels. Progress toward these agreed-upon goals will be benchmarked carefully to be sure those investments are making the difference we intend for them to make.

In an era when all universities face difficult choices, we do best when we think through where we can reasonably hope to achieve the standards of excellence we
aspire to and where limitations of resources and hence the need to focus on the domains where we can be both robust and distinctive. Hence we are asking the community to focus both on the substance of each department’s intellectual mission and the undergraduate and graduate teaching programs that convey it.

We will need to pay special attention both to the specifics of department programs and to universal goals for excellence in teaching, advising, student engagement, and timely completion of their degrees. Indeed, because these universal goals have already been discussed at length across the campus, we look to the end of the Part I planning process to resolve unit-level plans for improvement on these key dimensions of the undergraduate experience by December 1.

In many ways, Part II – the focus on the future of our fields, on how changes in them should be reflected in graduate (and undergraduate) education – is more challenging. It requires further deliberation and debate, in some instances the engagement of scholars in related departments or from other universities. The Deans will work with their colleagues to foster that process and each school/college will have its own way of getting toward closure. Our hope, though, is that by the end of the Spring term of 2015, we have at least the outlines of your thinking. These documents will also be discussed at length in the Provost’s office as they will help to shape the investments we make in graduate education, faculty hiring, and facilities.

The reports on unit planning

Toward both of these ends, we offer a set of suggested prompts for both parts which every department will need to speak to in their reports. Deans will be working to translate these questions into forms that are most meaningful to their colleagues, as they necessarily are somewhat generic in this iteration. But all of these topic areas need to be covered. Further development of prompts for Part II will be part of the fall’s activity.

Both reports should be narratives, but in most instances will be accompanied by tables and figures needed to illustrate your analyses. We are responsible for providing data to you for this purpose and to track down additional sources of information that you may need to complete the task in a way that is evidence-driven.

While this process will take place throughout the academic year 2014-15, we anticipate that the Colleges will want to maintain an ongoing process of assessment which will inform plans for the development of new fields, investment in ongoing areas of strength and continuous improvement of the educational mission we are entrusted with.
Suggested Prompts

Part I: Where we Stand or “looking in the mirror”

Investment of Choice — Intellectual mission and scholarly recognition.

The AQUAD reports on your department may be a valuable resource for answering the questions in this section, but you will also be provided additional data drawn from a variety of external and internal sources.

1. At present, how would you describe your department’s place in your discipline? What is its special character or niche? What are you known for by colleagues elsewhere? Understanding that departments cannot do everything, what subfields or foci have attained a critical mass?

2. A department’s reputation in its field depends very heavily on the contributions of its faculty.

   a. How well is your department doing in making its mark? How are its achievements manifested in publications of importance, grants, fellowships won by your faculty? It is important here not to just list achievements but to grapple with the question of stature, impact, and creativity.

   b. Creating a climate of high expectations, momentum, collaboration, and intellectual vitality is essential to a positive academic culture. How is your department doing in developing and sustaining its internal vibrancy? Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that your faculty are productive and generating impactful work at all levels of seniority?

3. Describe how your department articulates diversity, equity, and inclusiveness as a factor in academic excellence and in your department’s intellectual mission. How do your department’s research priorities and productivity reflect this attribute?

4. Why should a top-flight faculty candidate with multiple offers join your department? Do we have problems retaining people in your field? How are we doing on diversity as compared to “best in class”?

5. Despite remarkable contributions to all of our fields of expertise, UMass lags in badges of distinction such as academy memberships and other prestigious awards; do you presently have ways of ensuring that meritorious faculty are nominated for these honors?
6. What is your department’s role in your college and in the University? How do you contribute to the college and campus scholarly mission? In what ways does your department engage in interdisciplinary activity?

7. What is the role of community-engaged research in your department’s research priorities? How is excellence in community-engaged research and teaching documented and rewarded?

8. Given the difficulty of securing external support for research and the limitations of our budget (something all universities face), we know we cannot do everything. We want to maintain critical mass and research excellence in particular fields.
   a. Are there current research strengths in your department that align well with federal or state or regional priorities? Is it possible/advisable to strengthen this in the context of faculty turnover or growth?
   b. What can we say today about choices of emphasis: Are there unique niches we should preserve/strengthen? Are there emerging areas we should shift into? In that context, are there specialties that should be shrunk/eliminated over time?

9. Are we exploring all appropriate current funding sources for research, including industry? Are there “mega” grants on which we should be partnering?

10. Given current and near-term demand, are we using our faculty to maximize their impact on our missions (teaching, research, engagement)?
   a. What steps have been and could be considered now to give faculty greater impact by focusing more on research right now (because of productivity and timing of their research agenda), or by focusing more on teaching right now because of where they are in their research trajectory?

Attractiveness, Competitiveness, and Effectiveness in Graduate Education

1. There are many excellent choices of colleges/universities in the country for someone seeking an MA or Ph.D. in your field. At present, what attracts graduate students to your department? What do you promise to provide them that makes the experience distinctive?

2. What is your admissions target --- that is, how many new graduate students do you try to recruit in each year? What factors entered into your selection of that target? Are you able to recruit new students of the quality that you
want? Is your graduate program right-sized to fit your pool of quality applicants, faculty resources, funding, and employment prospects?

3. About 75% of our doctoral programs have time to degree higher than the average of their fields. 44% of our doctoral students and 16% of our master’s students drop out before completing their degrees. What is the attrition rate in your department? What factors lead to non-completion? At present, is your department making any special efforts to ensure timely completion of the doctorate?

4. Given the fairly diverse population of graduate students, including underrepresented minorities and those with international status, how is your department understanding and responding to the range of student backgrounds and contributing to their success in teaching, advising, and mentoring?

5. What kinds of jobs are your graduate alumni getting? What are you doing to prepare them for these jobs? (Disciplines where post-docs are the norm should look beyond the post-doc to the alum’s permanent placement.)

Destination of Choice - Undergraduate education

The phase one planning process established the goal that UMass Amherst should be a “destination of choice” for talented students able to take advantage of our strengths. Promoting that goal begins with our effectiveness across a number of dimensions of quality. Our ability to integrate and synergize activity across these dimensions will define our overall success, so an important first step is to assess our strength within and across the many characteristics of an effective learning environment.

1. Program Attractiveness and Competitiveness. To what extent and in what ways does your department contribute to the “destination” goal, and to the campus’s overall attractiveness vis-à-vis competitor institutions? E.g.,
   - To what extent is it a “destination” for students with specific interests, or for highly qualified students generally?
   - How does it contribute to the campus’s goals with respect to specific communities of students, e.g., underrepresented minorities, low-income and first generation, international and out-of-state)

   **In what areas could departmental impact be increased in terms of attracting students, and how is that reflected in departmental plans?**

2. Overall Program Effectiveness. How well is your department meeting the overall needs and expectations of your majors for a high-quality educational experience? E.g.,
• Recognizing that many factors influence student progress, to what extent are your majors moving through and completing their studies in a timely manner?
• To what extent do your majors see their experiences as effective and integrated, both in terms of their formal education here and their preparation for careers and life?

What are your priorities for improving program effectiveness, and how are these reflected in your departmental plan?

3. Student Engagement. The campus plan emphasizes active and engaged learning, and strong advising and teaching relationships demonstrated to promote student success. How well is your department incorporating these goals across its undergraduate experience?
  • How well are you understanding and meeting students’ needs through formal advising?
  • How effectively are you engaging students, both in terms of majors and service instruction?
  • How is class size promoting or inhibiting effective student engagement, especially in the upper division?

What priorities do you see for improvement, and how are they reflected in your departmental plan?

4. Teaching Contributions and Effectiveness. How well are you organizing and delivering undergraduate instruction? E.g.,
  • How do your majors view the overall quality of your teaching?
  • Across all your course offerings, to what extent are you demonstrating established best practices for effective learning?
  • What contributions does your department make to the general education program of UMass students? How do these contributions reflect the distinctiveness of your undergraduate program(s)?

What are your priorities for improving teaching effectiveness and impact, and how are they reflected in your departmental plan?

5. Student Outcomes. When the student learning outcomes assessment program is fully implemented, we will have more direct evidence of the extent to which students are achieving campus and departmental learning objectives. Until then, we can still take advantage of students’ own reports to assess what they derive from their UMass experiences. E.g.,
  • What is their overall assessment of their learning across your courses?
  • What is their assessment of the extent to which UMass contributed to important skills and habits of mind?
• How did their studies in the major incorporate high-impact practices such as internships, study abroad, and undergraduate research?
• Do their career and life trajectories at graduation conform with your hopes and expectations for them?

In your plan, what steps are you taking to clarify and enrich your learning objectives for your students, and target specific improvements in achieving those objectives?

6. Effective Use of Resources. Promoting quality and effectiveness across all the domains identified above relies on the effective deployment of resources. Given the many competing demands on resources, and especially on faculty time and talent, how effectively do you use your instructional resources? E.g.,
  • What are your practices and trends with respect to teaching activity in terms of both student credit hours and course sections per instructor?
  • What are you practices – and the effectiveness of those practices – in terms of the number and mix of instructional staff?
  • What can be learned in the context of practices within the discipline at other research-intensive public universities?

How does your departmental plan address development and management of resources necessary to support your substantive goals for your program of undergraduate education?

7. Diversity, inclusion and access. How well does your department attract students from under-represented groups, provide opportunities for connections with faculty/other students, reflect their varied experiences via curricula, and sustain their retention all the way to graduation?

8. Internationalization. How well is your department/program incorporating an international perspective and/or experience into the curriculum? Faculty led international programs? Encouraging study abroad? Specific areas to consider include:
  • What aspects of your department’s offerings make it the most attractive destination of choice for international students and scholars? How well are the particular needs of international students supported to ensure their success? Indicators and metrics in this area include demographics of current international student enrollment, and accessibility academic and co-curricular programs to support internationals students (RAPs, RSOs, etc.).
  • Education abroad opportunities are key to the acquisition of intercultural competencies and to broadening students’ worldviews. How are high impact practices like education abroad and internships overseas supported and integrated into the curriculum in your
department? Indicators and metrics in this area include demographics of student participation (available from IPO), presence of curricular integration pathways, impact of education abroad on student success, faculty involvement in education abroad programs, and availability of scholarships to support education abroad opportunities.

- Global learning competencies are sine qua non for student success in the globalized work environment. How well are global learning competencies articulated in the curricula of the various disciplines or courses offered by your department?

9. **Outreach and Community Engagement.** UMass is distinctive in its emphasis on engagement beyond our borders. It takes the form of service learning courses, internships and independent study projects, community-engaged research projects, and group class work to co-create solutions to community issues and prepare future civic leaders. It also takes the form of volunteerism, activism, clubs, and other co-curricular activities. While much of this takes place outside of the formal boundaries of classrooms and curricula, departments vary in how intentional they are in incorporating these activities into a student’s progress through the major. How is community-engaged learning such as internships, practicums, community service learning courses, undergraduate community-based research, etc. addressed in your department, integrated across the curriculum, or linked to learning goals? How are community partnerships developed and sustained to support student learning through curricular and co-curricular activities?

**Part II: Planning for the Future (Spring 2015)**

*The deans will be working with departments to organize strategies for brainstorming and deliberation in College wide settings over the unit plans for the future. We will return to the community with a more developed set of suggested prompts for part II of the unit level analysis. For now, we simply suggest issues we believe will be on the table.*

**Faculty and research mission**

1. As you look to the next decade, what do you believe the critical research questions or domains of exploration are likely to be? What emerging areas or innovative approaches are on that frontier?

2. To what extent and in what way can your department lead the way or participate in these new explorations? What aspects of the research agenda of the future should your department focus on so that it makes a distinctive mark?
   a. How should faculty hiring reflect these new domains? What areas do we need to build in so that our work has impact within them?
b. Areas of traditional strength are also important and may remain high priorities. How should we build the faculty so that these fields are renewed and hence remain robust?

c. Given that we are not likely to have resources to do everything we might like, what areas should we reduce or eliminate to make room for the highest priorities?

d. As you look across your school or out to other schools, what kinds of synergies are possible, including cluster hiring that is boundary spanning, that would elevate our contributions?

3. As retirements come into play, what bridge investments are of highest priority to avoid losing strength?

4. What would be needed to better align our research strengths with federal, state or regional priorities?

   a. Is it possible/advisable to strengthen them in the context of faculty turnover or growth?
   b. What more should we do to explore appropriate funding sources for research, including industry? Are there “mega” grants on which we should be partnering?
   c. How can we utilize community-based partnerships or community-engaged research toward mutual benefit in addressing important issues in your field?

5. How can we tailor the roles of our faculty to maximize their impact on our missions (teaching, research, engagement)?

   a. Are there those who would have greater impact by focusing more on research right now (because of productivity and timing of their research agenda)?
   b. Are there those who would have greater impact by focusing more on teaching right now because of where they are in their research trajectory?

6. Are we exploring all appropriate funding sources for research, including industry? Are there “mega” grants on which we should be partnering?

7. What are the critical future needs (maintenance, replacement, growth) for equipment, facilities, and support personnel to realize the long term research ambitions of your department?

Graduate training

We need to return to the evaluation that began with the Graduate Program Review and take it to completion. The assessments it provided were very worthwhile. But we need now to ask how they should be used as a basis for determining the future
1. Going forward, what should the mission of graduate education be in your department? Is the focus training the next generation of research professors? Preparing students for non-academic careers?
   a. Given the difficulties of the job market now and for the next decade, how realistic are these goals?
   b. What changes do you need to make to realize them? How does your program of courses, exams, papers, dissertation preparation etc need to evolve in order to ensure your students are as successful as possible?

2. How competitive is the support package for your doctoral students? We know there are problems at play here. The question is how we fix them.
   a. Since it is unlikely we will see philanthropic resources to improve the picture, how might we reconfigure the resources we have to make the graduate package more attractive?
   b. Would it be worthwhile to reduce the size of the graduate cohort so as to increase the support we can provide to each of the students we do admit (esp, increasing fellowship support, summer funds, etc.)?
   c. If we went down that road, are there positive alternatives for meeting our responsibilities to undergraduates for teaching that graduate students are now fulfilling?

3. How vital is it for them to prepare external research/fellowship grant applications and what forms of assistance should the faculty give them in doing so?

4. What forms of professional development should be departmental responsibilities and which ones should belong to the graduate school? Are there better ways of incorporating the services provided “centrally” so that everyone benefits from them?

**Undergraduate training**

1. In the Fall, we will have taken a look in the mirror and by December every department/program will have communicated to their Dean, some action items they could undertake in the near term to improve our work with undergraduates. Returning to this question for the long run, though, we should think through questions like these:
   a. How rigorous or demanding is the education you provide your undergraduates?
   b. Are we asking students to be creative and innovative in the course of
completing the program? Are our courses preparing them for the futures they seek, for the responsibilities they have as adults to be critical thinkers and discerning citizens?

2. Going forward, how could your department better contribute to the general education program on campus? Are there domains where you could be a stronger presence? And what are your thoughts on how to make gen ed a more robust or thematic experience for the students? Is that a good idea?

3. Over the long term, what improvements should be made to boost the quality of your major?

   a. A flagship university’s emphasis on research should reach right down to the youngest members of our community. What could we do to increase the opportunities for undergraduates to participate in original research with faculty mentors?

   b. Does the major as currently constituted provide students with the methodological training and substantive understanding to do so?

   c. What capstone courses or experiences could be added so that every major departs UMass with a research experience under their belt?

   d. What benchmarks should the department adopt to monitor student progress in the major more effectively?

   e. What other high impact practices, such as community service learning, internships, volunteer experiences, field placements, and study abroad, are important to provide for your students, and how would you recommend this be achieved?

4. Do we have capacity to grow enrollment? If so, how can we accomplish this? Will this be revenue positive or negative?

5. How can your department improve on the classroom experience of your enrollees?

   a. Should teaching performance be more important and how would we go about ensuring we improve?

   b. Are there ways to organize the existing faculty so that more of our students can enjoy small classes, especially your juniors and seniors?

6. What do you plan to do to improve the major advising process? Assessing where you are now, what is a realistic target for improvement over the next two years? How will you know if you have made progress against this goal?
7. Students are eager to plan their movement into the world of work through internships. Some fields are more proactive in providing them than others. How would you improve on your department’s track record in this regard?

8. To what degree should study abroad and UMass faculty-led international programs play a role in your major?