From the 722nd Meeting of the Faculty Senate held on December 11, 2012

“UPDATE BY THE JOINT TASK FORCE ON STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT”
NANCY COHEN, BRYAN HARVEY AND AMILCAR SHABAZZ, CO-CHAIRS
(FOR BACKGROUND, SEE http://www.umass.edu/provost/node/137)

The PowerPoint presentation that accompanied this update is accessible at:
http://www.umass.edu/senate/fs/fs_minutes_12-13.htm

_Bryan Harvey, Associate Provost for Academic and Resource Planning and Co-Chair of the Joint Task Force on Strategic Planning_, stated that he and the other co-chairs would be bringing the Senate up to date on the project launched by the Senate at its first meeting of the semester. Chancellor Subbaswamy was busy hosting the Trustees during the meeting, so Associate Provost Harvey presented on the vision and context document that began the strategic planning process. The current strategic planning process began with some statements made by Chancellor Subbaswamy regarding the campus’ situation. Part of that was questioning the essential function of public research, land-grant institutions. That questioning boiled down to creating impact for the public good through innovation. UMass has been doing that for 150 years, but there is a big question about what that means today. Like everyone else in society, UMass is facing major demographic, technological, and financial changes. In a sense, the public universities, in the face of the most recent recession, particularly, but dating back decades more generally, are trying to reinvent ways to make that mission work in current times. One observation is that our basic organizing model, the convergence of the immersive residential educational experience with the rich research environment—which is a complicated and expensive mission—may not be sustainable in light of changes in finances. There are two challenges for successful adaptation. One is to do what we’ve been doing for generations: try to become more effective at demonstrating to the public why it is that the impact UMass makes should matter to them. Moreover, UMass must try to find out how to do the work that we do in this more challenging resource environment. One of the dilemmas we face, in some ways an irony, is that even while the public’s tax dollars have been withdrawing from institutions like UMass, and, therefore, student costs have increased, policy makers seem to be more and more interested in controlling student costs. This is a delicate position to be working through. There is also the question of growth. Many institutions like UMass are trying to respond to their financial situations by increasing enrollment, especially out-of-state enrollment. We have had good success with that. However, when an institution increases enrollment, it takes on new costs: capital outlay, operating expenses, et cetera. It is not as if an institution can simply grow its way to prosperity. There is another delicate balance in increasing both enrollment and quality. All told, the business model for the public research university is a little bit frayed. This planning process has been directed toward renewing that vision of creating impact for the public good through innovation both by demonstrating value—the research, teaching, and outreach done by the University—and developing a sustainable cost structure for that. We have a lot of innovations in pedagogy that have been in development for years. What is the next set of those? How do we make more effective use of the money we do have? The more successful we are at demonstrating the value of what we do, the more likely it is that the people in our environment—students and their families, policy makers, business and industry leaders—will see us as an organization that is worth investing in. UMass does not simply want to survive the current situation, it wants to be a leader in the new emerging role for public research universities. We want to not only talk about providing exceptional value, but define what that means. We have struggled a little with this. The Framework for Excellence discussed membership in the AAU, but even that does not exactly fit UMass’ situation. There are many institutions equivalent to AAU schools—including UMass—that are not in the AAU and may never be. Meanwhile, there are many important aspects of undergraduate success and societal service that are not a central part of the AAU model. It is also true that the research boom that fueled many of the current AAU members is plateauing as the federal government has more constriction on its ability to invest in research. In the face of that, we have to somehow go beyond what this all meant a few years ago and think about what it means for tomorrow. Obviously, many things are changing in higher education. We want to think about what tomorrow’s criteria for excellence will be. It increasingly appears that tomorrow’s leading universities will be flexible, adaptive, and creative. UMass is well-positioned for this transition. The University has done a good job responding to a number of these changes—many of which have been going on
for a long time. It seems likely that if UMass continues its adaptive approach, it will find opportunities to demonstrate leadership that might have been difficult for the University when it was competing within a set of terms that were less favorable for it. We have done a good job adapting. The question is, what is the next stage of that? Then there is the question of how an institution goes about doing this. There is a lot of talk about integration as something that adaptive organizations are doing. What does that mean for our situation? Really, it boils down to figuring out how to accomplish multiple goals whenever we make a policy decision or take a new action. How can we advance ourselves in more than one direction by looking across the things that we do? This could be by utilizing multi-group investigators for research grants, instructional programs that draw in individuals from different units, or any number of other options. The planning process can help advance this kind of work, in part, simply, by making what everyone is trying to accomplish clear; in part by bringing focus to some of the common problems we share; and in part by helping us to understand how we are using our resources and seeing if there are opportunities to get more value from them. The planning process has started. It is not going to be completed in the year, but, by next spring, the planners hope to be at a point at which they can engage the campus in conversations about what the planning looks like going forward. In order to do that, the Joint Task Force has organized a process to talk about a number of key questions, which Co-Chair Shabazz presented.

Senator Amilcar Shabazz, Professor of Afro-American Studies and Co-Chair of the Joint Task Force on Strategic Planning, stated that, to begin the strategic planning process, the Joint Task Force first established its core mission, looked at its vision and context, and realized that there are two overarching issues that the Joint Task Force wanted to take into the strategic planning work in all four group areas, which will be later described. The first issue addressed by the Joint Task Force involves asking what kind of community UMass Amherst is. How inclusive are we? How wide is the door open here? What accessibility does this institution offer? What sort of diversity—economic, racial, gender-based—do we have? The panel at the last Faculty Senate meeting gave a sense of some of the research questions and issues surrounding diversity. The Joint Task Force is taking input from the two Faculty Senate Councils that work in diversity, the Status of Women Council and the Status of Diversity Council. The Joint Task Force has already received input from the University’s Chief Diversity Officer and the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Diversity Initiatives, thanks to Débora D. Ferreira. That input has been gathered and helps to inform diversity questions. As that information is distributed to the committees, the Joint Task Force hopes to drill down even deeper in the areas around values and expectations as a University in terms of diversity, inclusion, and access. The Joint Task Force will further examine diversity strategies in all areas. The other overarching issue has to do with resource efficiency and the effectiveness of all of our strategies. This will be central to the work in all areas, as we work in an environment in which resources are not unlimited. We must take that into account and consider institutional resource strategies that can help create achievable goals. A perspective conscious of resource efficiency and effectiveness needs to be present as the various committees consider their specific substantive questions.

The biggest area of focus, of course, is the teaching work that we do. Considering this, we discuss student learning, experience, and success. There are a handful of components in this area that frame the strategic planning process. The first is the path to completion. We offer degrees here; what are the obstacles in the pathway to successful completion of degrees, whether on an accelerated basis, on a four-year basis, or in situations where students go beyond four years? What are the issues surrounding access to programs and courses that may affect the path to completion? What are we doing in terms of services to students such as advising them of career options or additional studies? What are they going to do when they complete the degree? Another important area in student learning experience and student success is developing the value that is in our curriculum. How can we be a more responsive, interesting, and distinctive institution? Again, impact, innovation, integration are taken into thinking about this subject, looking at curricular innovation, the rich choice of opportunities available in our degree programs, and undergraduate research involvement. UMass is a research university, but what does that mean at the undergraduate level. Then, of course, career development is also a part of the value offered in the curriculum.

After student learning and success, the next major area is research and research funding. Under this rubric, we are looking at issues of federal funding; we are looking at the relationship of our research to business and industry, as well as the political economy; and we are looking at how our research endeavors, our scholarly
and creative work, affects the civil society in general. There is a dynamic planning group in the area of research foci and funding.

Service is important. As a land-grant institution, UMass is about serving the world. Our goals cannot be simply to serve our various disciplines and professional areas. What is our benefit to the Commonwealth and beyond? How do we assess that and how do we think strategically about where we are going in the future? Here the Joint Task Force is taking up questions of external accountability, as well as looking at the perspective of local, state, and federal government, which are integral to UMass’ efforts in research and education. We are looking at demonstrating our leadership in being accountable to various external constituencies, as well as demonstrating the value of faculty time spent on research. There are a number of questions in this area. How do we align undergraduate and graduate offerings? How do we play a meaningful role in the debate over research value and impact? These are some of the framing questions going on as we think about our benefit to the Commonwealth and beyond.

The fourth planning group area is a little outside the University’s holy trinity of teaching, research, and service, but is integral at this time. This is looking at having a balanced and sustainable resource strategy as we plan into the future. How do we expand revenues? How do we focus resources? How do we control costs? How do we establish the institutional infrastructure that we need to be the excellent, top-quality institution going into the 21st century? In this area, we bring a number of questions, learning from our recent revenue enhancement work, looking at a plausible revenue strategy going forward, looking at cost containment, and examining what programmatic facilities we will need going forward.

These are the four planning groups that have been established and will move forward with the strategic planning process.

Nancy Cohen, Professor of Nutrition and Co-Chair of the Joint Task Force on Strategic Planning, updated the Senate on the progress of the Joint Task Force on Strategic Planning. The Joint Task Force was formed in September with the charge to make recommendations to the Chancellor regarding a high-level strategic plan to serve as the University’s mandated response to the accreditation process. To meet the needs of the accreditation body, the strategic plan is due in August of 2013. This plan will build on the Framework for Excellence, but plans to move beyond that document with the goal of creating one of the leading public universities of the next generation. This plan will also monitor subsequent developments of administrative and academic unit plans. Membership of the Joint Task Force includes members of both the faculty and the administration. The Joint Task Force is structured around four committees that each address one of the issues previously addressed by Senator Shabazz. Vice Provost Carol Barr and Professor Diane Flaherty co-chair the Student Learning Experience and Student Success committee; Vice Chancellor Michael Malone and Professor James Kurose co-chair the Research Foci and Funding committee; Assistant Provost Martha Stassen and Professor Robert Nakosteen co-chair the Benefit to the Commonwealth and Beyond committee; and Associate Vice Chancellor Andrew Mangels and Professor Anurag Sharma co-chair the Balanced and Sustainable Resource Strategy committee. Each of those committees also have committee members that are not part of the Joint Task Force at large. Vice Provost Barr reported that there are 54 members on the Student Learning Experience and Student Success committee. There is wide-ranging participation. The full Joint Task Force held six meetings in the fall of 2012. The Joint Task Force reviewed its charge and established the four committees it is comprised of. Those committees are also involving other relevant University and Faculty Senate groups. So far, the Undergraduate Education Council, the Enrollment Management Team, the Research Council, the Joint Task Force on Accountability, the Program and Budget Council, and the Chancellor’s Diversity Advisory Committee, as well as other groups, have been involved with JTFSO. A guide to planning has been edited to serve as a starting document. This includes most of the information presented to the Faculty Senate. The guide is titled Impact, Innovation and Integration, as those are the themes of this planning event. The guide outlines initial strategic questions, although the committees may and will come up with additional questions that need to be answered. The committees’ structure, tasks, and time have been determined. Moreover, a format to be worked toward has been developed. This is all a work in progress. Overarching questions such as those about diversity, inclusion, and access will be posed to each of the committees to ensure that they are being addressed. As a full group, the Joint Task Force has examined available data. Several presentations have been given on the budget, as well as on the Graduate School review and how UMass has been performing within the criteria of the U.S. News and World Report.
rankings. A website has been developed that can be accessed from the Provost’s Office website. The site includes the Joint Task Force’s charge, the first version of the planning guide, and the membership of Joint Task Force and its committees. There is also a planning library, which will be added to as new documents are created. There are many documents there already that the Joint Task Force and the University as a whole can access. These include the diversity plan, affirmative action plan, and strategic planning presentations that have taken place already.

The Co-Chairs of the Joint Task Force have met with the co-chairs of the various committees and will continue to do so. This is a way to cross-fertilize ideas. The committees are not silos, and anything that affects one group affects all the others. There will be additional presentations of additional data as each committee works toward developing a draft document to present to the campus and open campus-wide discussion. Using the timeline presented in the PowerPoint, the Joint Task Force is currently in what is shown as the third column. The committees have been formed and their work is underway. The Joint Task Force is inventorying its status and working towards short, medium, and long-term actions. March 15 is the target date for the completion of the current phase. At that time, something should be presented to the campus for discussion. Professor Cohen met with strategic planning consultants recently and came across a slide from the New Directions Collaborative that relates well to the process at UMass. A main goal of the current strategic planning process is to create a space from which innovative responses can emerge. The Joint Task Force began by asking strategic questions. It has created opportunities to weave between networks, connect diverse perspectives, connect ourselves, self-organize, learn from elsewhere, learn from models within the system and outside, and see the system as a whole. Professor Cohen is considering this forum part of the open space in this process. It is hoped that many innovative ideas will come to the forefront. Thinking of scale, as shown in another slide from the New Directions Collaborative, a goal of the Joint Task Force is to hit the 30,000 feet and 10,000 feet view. The 30,000 feet view would look at the whole system and policy, as well as connections. The 10,000 feet view would entail connecting those strategies, organizations, and resources to coordinate projects and work on leverage points. We are hoping to be able to do that this year so the on-the-ground work can proceed.

Senator Curt Conner stated that he has been through about four strategic planning processes since he has been at UMass. Not a single one of them has ever been fully implemented. Along the way of each one of them, the University got a new Chancellor or Provost and started from scratch. He wondered if the current planners had thought of looking at the old reports and plans to see if it would be better to start with them instead of starting over every time.

Senator Shabazz noted that the planners want to build a robust planning library. What exists online is a work in progress and past plans will be considered and added to that library.

Associate Provost Harvey stated that the planning must and is taking previous plans into account. There are many factors that have to line up to allow a strategic planning process to be successful. The plans don’t all fail, but they are not all that commonly successful. Having looked at many plans, Associate Provost Harvey believes that UMass has many of the factors in line at this point. All that we can do is try. It is interesting to look at old plans, but the essential aspect of strategic planning is analyzing the moment and situation that the University is in. Much of the effort described so far is about understanding the current moment. Maybe somebody in the next strategic planning process will say, “What a great job those guys did back in 2012.”

Professor Cohen added that the Joint Task Force is following up on the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Strategic Oversight, which evaluated the Framework for Excellence and collected much data and information that is being taken into account.