

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST  
OFFICE OF THE FACULTY SENATE

From the 684<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate held on April 23, 2009

Robert C. Holub, Chancellor

I was asked to make a few comments with the regard to the “Framework for Excellence,” the flagship report that was placed on my web site last week. For those of you who have read it, we are eager to hear from you and receive any input you have.

Subsequent to being hired here, I was asked why I was interested in the position. I have always said that I was drawn by the first line of the job description: we desire someone who is interested in moving the Amherst campus forward into the top ranks of universities. That is what I have been focusing on since I have been here. What I have tried to do with the senior staff and then with the deans and managers of those in high-level positions is put together some of the elements that will move the campus in that direction. That was our goal. I think we have achieved that in this document. Achieving it in a document is much easier than achieving it in reality. In order to achieve it in reality, we will have to implement a lot of these elements. That will take some planning on the part of various units on campus. It will demand the hard work of many individuals on campus.

I hope that this is something that we can see as a roadmap for the next decade. I hope this can be seen as a way to achieve the goal that we all share of being in the upper echelon of public research universities in the country. I am happy to discuss any individual part of this document with you or to hear comments. Comments are probably best submitted in writing if they are going to be incorporated.

Ernest May, Secretary of the Faculty Senate – I wanted to congratulate you for the measure of this document which is neither too much nor too little. It has been a turbulent year, and it is hard to say too much because the ground seems to be rapidly shifting underneath us. You have come to a good place in setting out some principles that the community can discuss on a comfortable timeline.

Some of the strategic choices that will have to be made are not as apparent in this document as they will have to become as we go forward. I would like to know more about your thinking on one of these issues: in this institution and most other institutions like it, there is a tension between the strategic opportunities that occur in the area of research and the places on the campus where the students actually enroll. There are great teaching demands in certain parts of the campus, but these are not the same parts of the campus where there are great research opportunities. There is some overlap, but it is a partial overlap. I wondered how you think about resource allocation in the face of that ongoing tension.

Chancellor Holub – The document tries to lay out some considerations for campus funding. One of the ways that funding occurs is through enrollment. Even if there were no respect for teaching—and I think there is respect for teaching—it does have a monetary value.

Particular weight is not given to one part of the campus over another. Parts of the campus contribute differently to the overall institution. We are proud of this institution because it is a comprehensive campus. As long as everyone is contributing at a high level, then they are going to be contributing to the welfare of the campus. The American Association of Universities (AAU) looks at the diversity and the variety of programs on the campus. It is important for us to do well across the campus and not just to focus on one part or another.

We would like to see the enrollment spread out more evenly on the campus. As I have said a number of times, I would like to see new and exciting programs that are developed on all parts of the campus to attract students. We not only need a research initiative, we also need an initiative that encompasses things that attract students to the campus as well. Sometimes they overlap. Sometimes

they do not overlap quite as much, but they are all important if we are going to be successful in the future.

Senator Bruce Baird – I was struck by the section in the document that addressed both research and the undergraduate experience simultaneously and tried to point in the direction of involving undergraduates in research right away. Could you say something about how that might affect the humanities or if that is part of the Strategic Plan?

Chancellor Holub – I hope it would be. There is a lot of specific implementation that needs to occur first, but I think involving students in faculty research gives them a stronger bond with the institution and teaches them something about how knowledge is created and promulgated. We are all doing different kinds of research and scholarship. I think it would be beneficial to integrate undergraduates into that process as much as possible.

There are a number of programs around the country that look at how to do that. Best practices at other institutions can teach us how to involve undergraduates in research. It is a valuable experience that enriches their education. The faculty member's research is often enriched by it as well.

Senator Steven Brewer – I welcome several of the affirmative statements in the presented plan. In particular, I welcome the Chancellor's decision to begin supporting the same number as the MSP by pledging his support for the 250 Plan which was left to languish last fall. I am also pleased to see increased support for graduate students, although an unresolved issue is the curriculum fee which encourages researchers to preferentially hire post docs rather than graduate students. The Research Council documented this last fall. Still, there is much here that represents good ideas on how to go forward.

My principle concern is that the Chancellor's framework seems driven primarily by asking where strategic investments might improve the ranking of UMass Amherst as compared with other institutions rather than seeking to improve the research, teaching or service as defined by the students and faculty of the University. This plan aims to maximize how much better we can look to outsiders rather than how much better we can actually become. Should a research university make decisions solely or even partly based on external appearances or on the merits of the proposed activities?

Chancellor Holub – I do not see a contradiction between the two. If we do better for our students and in terms of research, scholarship and creative activity, I think we are going to look better externally.

We have not done as good a job as we can do in presenting ourselves externally. The reputation of this campus throughout the country is much higher than its reputation inside the state of Massachusetts. It is important that we pay attention to these kinds of external rankings. It is important that we pay attention to our branding. I have been talking to a number of candidates for Dean of the Isenberg School, and the Isenberg School does not do the kind of branding that it should do. It is possible that it is a better business school than it is given credit for. The campus is a much better campus than it is given credit for. We cannot continue to shortchange what we do here.

I talked to a couple of trustees at a dinner about a month and a half ago. They started to talk about the University of Connecticut and what an excellent university it is. UConn is not a bad university, but I said, "There is no academic department at UConn in the traditional areas of arts and sciences and engineering which ranks higher than the University of Massachusetts." They were surprised by that. These are our trustees. Our alumni would probably also be surprised by that.

We just saw a survey of the top hundred universities in the world. I think it was conducted by *Newsweek*. We were ranked among the top universities in the world. Only 20 public research universities in this country were on that list. No one knows that.

We had the highest number of applications last year, the best class that came in by indicators. We granted the most baccalaureates and the most master's degrees in our history. We had the best first- and second-year retention and the best six-year graduation rates. Nobody knows that, and I did not know it either. I had to discover it on the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) web site. Other people have to know about this if we are going to get the full credit for it. Getting the full credit is not just so we have the rankings, it also so that we attract money. Donors give money to things that are successful. That includes the legislature and industry. There is good reason for us to appear what we are externally. By getting better, we will appear better externally.

Senator Brewer – I do not disagree with that. However, I have often heard trustees point out characteristics of top flight research universities around the country and try to use those as models for how the UMass system or UMass Amherst should change. They conflate the idea that if we made UMass Amherst look like these universities, UMass Amherst would be that much better. In fact, if we look at the unique situation and problems that we confront on the ground here and address those directly, we will get a lot more mileage rather than changing, generically, the parameters of the campus so that it looks like another place.

Chancellor Holub – The conversation is a little abstract. I am someone who looks at best practices in the country. As I have said in some instances, I think that some of the best practices in the country do not fit here. Some of them do. The great thing about public higher education is that there are no secrets. Everyone is ready to trumpet successful ideas. We can learn from those ideas, and we can implement the ideas that will help us. I think we should look at other campuses, but we should not take wholesale models from other campuses and just apply them here without considering the special circumstances.

For example, we are not located within a large city. There are certain constraints involved with that. You cannot apply models of universities located in cities to our university. It would be foolish to take on some kind of a model without reflecting on the history of the institution. But, it would be just as foolish not to look at these models and practices of other institutions.

Senator Curt Conner – In your section on graduate education, you forcefully argue that we need to increase our graduate student population and PhD output. The University's increase in mandatory student fees is driving us in the opposite direction. For example, I can now offer only three PhD positions on a large grant. Only a handful of years ago, I could have offered four or five. It costs almost as much for a post doctoral student as for a PhD student. The post doc is about twice as productive. Based on your encouragement, we in chemical engineering have doubled our incoming PhD class for next year. We look forward to your proposal to commit some one-time funding to enable programs to attract and retain an acceptable cohort of graduate students.

Chancellor Holub – When it comes to money, we have to see what the budget looks like. As you know, the budget process is far from over. With regard to the specific issue, the Graduate School is looking at comparisons throughout the country. This is a place where I would like to look at best practices and see what other institutions do with their curriculum fee.

Obviously you are talking about an issue that involves millions of dollars. I suggest we take a more gradual approach. We can run pilot programs for certain programs, for example, and try to build to the point where we can address it as a campus-wide issue. Much of this will fall under the purview of the planning in the central administration and the Graduate School in the coming years.

Senator Conner – I have a couple of suggestions in this area and wanted to run them by you. First, we could provide University funding for the six months for incoming PhD students. Many of our peer and better institutions in the country do this. It does burden the grants. We could also provide University funding for PhD students for the first new-hire faculty in order to increase the recruitment package. We are having a hard time competing with other institutions going for the same excellent faculty positions. You could also possibly roll back the graduate student fees.

Finally, I am most pleased with the direction of the initiatives that you put in front of us. My whole department is behind you in this and will do whatever we can to make it work.

Chancellor Holub – If you look at models from around the country, there are different ways in which departments do this. Some departments take any indirect cost recoveries, pool them in the department and use that for fellowships for incoming graduate students. That is a model used at a number of institutions, especially ones that have graduate students who go through rotations in labs. The model for chemical engineering is not necessarily going to be the same as the model for other departments that do not have that same kind of indirect cost recovery. We have to look at different models and decide which one is going to fit and be the most beneficial to us. As I mentioned earlier, looking at models from elsewhere is something that is going to be helpful and enlightening.

Senator W. Brian O'Connor – I thoroughly enjoyed reading the report, and I am intrigued by what you said on state support. A few weeks ago, at the State House, you and a few people in the room went to an event in which the alumni of this campus honored six distinguished alumni. If you have never been to that ceremony, I encourage you to go. It is a fantastically impressive ceremony. But, the President of the alumni asked all of the legislators who were present in the room to stand up and be recognized. Not one legislator was in the room. We need the legislators, and they need us. Let us hope they were all in meetings. It did not take anything away from the ceremony, which I think was fantastic, but it was disappointing that there was nobody there to say, “Congratulations, you guys are doing a great job.”

Chancellor Holub – It would have been nice if some were there. There were a few who were planning to come and then had to go to a meeting suddenly. I did have a chance to speak with some of the legislators and members of the legislative staff before the meeting. That was rewarding because there is now a cohort of UMass Amherst graduates who are staffing a lot of the legislature. They have gotten together and have a UMass Amherst group which is very nice and something we can hook into and make use of.

Senator Richard Bogartz – The framework for excellence presents a picture of an upward trajectory, at least in aspiration. Does the legislature have a similar sense that the proper place for the University of Massachusetts is in the higher echelons of universities in the country? Do they plan to support us in that endeavor?

Chancellor Holub – There are many who share that view. Certainly, the Governor and the executive branch of government support this view. There are certainly some legislators who do. There are legislators who are more concerned with other matters and are probably less enthusiastic about that. I do not think you can talk about the legislature as being of one mind. The ones who I have talked to and tried to persuade always agree that they support our campus, especially when you explain what it means for the state in terms of economic development, educating a workforce and keeping the most talented undergraduates inside the state. There is a lot of understanding for our mission. There is some notion that the legislature would rather we go up then down. Not everyone buys that kind of a vision or is fully supportive. There are people who have different agendas and have different views about what our mission is.

Senator Andrew Donson – In the 2007 *Princeton Review* of the top 350 colleges and universities in the United States, the University of Massachusetts ranked 20<sup>th</sup> among least satisfied students. I was curious where you got your data that students report a high-level of satisfaction when it seems, according to that survey, that we have among the least satisfied students.

Chancellor Holub – When we do exit surveys, there is a high degree of satisfaction among students. I am not sure where *The Princeton Review* gets their information, but I am not sure their surveys can be called either highly scientific or valid.