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Holub announces University's future in 'Framework'

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When Chancellor Robert C. Holub addressed the University of Massachusetts faculty in his inaugural address last September, he emphasized the idea of "leaving the past behind." Holub has recently announced his formal plans for the University's future in a document called the "Framework for Excellence."

The Framework, released to the University community on April 16, is a plan of how to boost the University's reputation. It was drafted by the chancellor, with input from faculty and staff.

"This document outlines the high-level considerations necessary to move us to the cadre of the very best public research universities in the country," the communication reads.

The Framework combines an analysis of the University's current position on a variety of levels, coupled with Holub's vision for the school and a loose set of details about how to get there by the year 2020. He plans to increase the size of the faculty, as well as both undergraduate and graduate student enrollment.

"I think, broadly, people are supportive of the direction we want to head toward," UMass spokesman Ed Blaguszewski said. "The question is what path we will take to get there."

The framework provides a blueprint for how the University should allocate its limited resources, as it was written in the context of the current budget deficit.

However, many of the proposed improvements are dependent upon an increased operating budget, specifically the upgrading of academic programs, boosting of faculty ranks and renovating of facilities.

The chancellor acknowledged in previous interviews that the current economic situation would most likely delay many of the plans he has for the campus. Instead of immediate improvements, the University may find itself in a position of preserving programs for several years until the operating budget can be consistently increased.

Yet the document emphasizes Holub's belief of the critical importance of a strong faculty in attaining the status of a top-tier research university.

"The prestige of this campus rests, to a great extent, on the research and creative activity conducted here," the document reads.

Holub also acknowledged that the departments with the most promising research prospects would be given funding priority, especially those most likely to receive federal and state grant funding.

Despite the strong tone of the document in support of faculty research productivity and graduate education, some members of the campus community expressed concern that the Framework deprioritizes undergraduate education.

Holub plans to increase the student body to approximately 22,500, while simultaneously increasing the amount of out-of-state students – both as methods to boost revenue.

"The plan is to, over time, grow the campus," Blaguszewski said. "It would not be to reduce the number of in-state students."

But more students, specifically more out-of-state students, would ideally boost revenue at a higher proportion than the requisite increase in expenses to educate these additional students.

Holub also plans to increase the graduate population, in addition to significantly boosting the number of doctorates awarded each year.

“Our graduate population is too small for an institution that aspires to be among the best public research campuses in the United States,” Holub wrote.

In addition to on-campus changes, Holub hopes to boost the reputation of the University in the eyes of the state legislature and potential alumni donors. As with his predecessor John V. Lombardi, Holub intends to make fundraising a key aspect of his administration.

The document’s status as an unfinished product has led the chancellor to actively collect feedback from the campus community via the “Office of the Chancellor” portion of the UMass website.

“It’s a starting point for discussion to move the University forward,” Blaguszewski said.

Several sections have already been changed based on feedback, including several paragraphs characterizing Commonwealth College, the University’s honors program.

Matt Rocheleau contributed to this report.

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