



University of
Massachusetts
Amherst

The Academic Imperative

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We who live and build America's research universities belong to one of the longest and most stable traditions of Western civilization. Although the content of research university life has changed over the centuries, its academic imperative remains focused on students, faculty, and the pursuit of understanding.

Teaching and research, students and faculty, organized in the academic guilds that define, create, validate, and transmit knowledge have kept research universities at the center of economic and cultural success for so many generations. This commitment, translated to the American context, took on somewhat different organizational forms from its European ancestors. The colleges of early America--Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and others--emerged as academic centers, focused on education within a particular religious tradition but independent of established religion. While the origins and operation of these colleges provide a rich history, it is their independence from

national control, religious or otherwise, that made them so dependent on their communities, their local private supporters, their alumni and friends, setting a pattern followed eventually by all American universities.

Another American invention brought us the land-grant college, a mid nineteenth century innovation for translating the core values of the academic tradition into engines of economic and social advancement. Yet in a peculiarly American way, the states assumed the responsibility for the new institutions while the federal government provided resources and a definition of national purpose.

The land-grant mission reaffirms the distinctively American combination of student education with the production of research and its translation into economic and social progress. The ability to build superb teaching and research programs sustains the institution's capacity to deliver

the land-grant mission. This land-grant phenomenon influenced most American public universities to see themselves not only in service to the society that supports them but also responsible in many ways for the economic, social, and cultural success of the states that created them. We in Amherst belong to this tradition having come into existence in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln's charter that granted land to the Commonwealth on behalf of the University of Massachusetts.

Over the years, the various states organized and reorganized their universities into different configurations and structures, each change advertised as a solution to perceived problems of coordination and efficiency, each rearrangement of the public higher education landscape seeking the optimal bureaucratic and political method for providing educational services to the state.

The systems that encompass these campus-based institutions serve critical functions everywhere, and the quality of system leadership makes a significant difference in the ability of the campuses to succeed. Systems manage the political environment, protect the institutions, and above all, secure revenue from their state's budget. Good university systems delegate most functions to the campuses and hold each campus accountable for its performance.

Whatever the structure, the work of research universities always remains focused on the campus-based faculty, staff, and students. The key indicator of the importance of the campus comes from students and faculty, who always identify their academic work by campus: *Berkeley*, *UCLA*, *Davis*, not the University of California. They speak of Indiana University *Bloomington*, University of Wisconsin *Madison*, and the University of Massachusetts *Amherst*.

We here in Amherst belong to a university system with strong presidential leadership and an effective board. Our system has a complicated political history, but we know that today this campus, UMass Amherst, belongs to a multi-campus university organization that expects us to perform; trustees and a president who expect us to take charge of our future and who give us the authority and responsibility to make the most of ourselves.

Have we resolved all operational issues between campus and system? No. Will we on occasion challenge system initiatives and programs? Yes. Even so, we have no doubt that UMass Amherst has the authority, the responsibility, and the opportunity to make the choices that will determine our success.

When I first considered engaging with UMass Amherst, my friends wondered why anyone would take on an institution with complicated state and local politics and inadequate finances. On closer inspection however, Amherst turned out to have an outstanding faculty and staff, and excellent students.

Indeed, the quality of the faculty tells us much about the fundamental soundness of any major research university. We can test for this quality in several ways. We can look at the awards and distinctions of the faculty and their grant and contract activity to get a general notion, but most of us use a somewhat less scientific method that is nonetheless infallible. We ask our friends.

When I asked faculty colleagues from the various guilds about UMass Amherst, each knew little about the university but much about our superb faculty. Each colleague knew the nationally preeminent work of Amherst faculty from their field; and with some confusion about our name, none had any doubt about the quality of our faculty.

Even with a superb faculty, however, every great research university builds its success on the adequacy of its revenue. Money, as my friends and colleagues know, matters. Money buys universities the opportunity to create quality, although money by itself does not necessarily produce quality.

Research university money comes from various sources. In our case, the Commonwealth's taxpayers provide core support. The students, through tuition and fees, add a significant amount. Together, their contribution could support a good undergraduate institution with some popular graduate programs and a modest portfolio of research.

The distinction of a national research university, however, comes from an additional investment made by alumni and friends through gifts, by the faculty and staff through grants and contracts, by entrepreneurs through the commercialization of intellectual property, and by external programs that create a surplus for reinvestment. Each of these sources of revenue serves to acquire the quality and support the extra value that transforms an adequate state college into a major flagship research university. We, in Amherst, already generate these funds, but we must do more if we are to meet the competition for the best faculty and staff, the best students, and the best programs.

Every research university, public or private, finds itself in an intense competition for the diverse high quality people—faculty, students, and staff—whose work defines the institution's academic success. Every college and university in America wants these quality people; every institution seeks to attract them because their engagement in the life of a university defines its success.

Why do the best people join us? The faculty and staff come to work in excellent facilities for the opportunity to accomplish great things. The university must support them with good salaries and a context that rewards achievement. The more quality people a university can get, the better it becomes. The best students come to be with other great students, for the insight and support of exceptional faculty and staff, because the university can support their financial needs, and for the context of a dynamic campus life. The competition for these people—faculty, students, and staff—determines the distinction of the university.

The engine of university success is simple to describe, if difficult to achieve: more money spent well. We must earn the money to gain the chance to spend it well. If we have money, but spend it poorly, the university may be richer but not better.

That is why performance counts. Performance is the word that describes our effectiveness; the word that reflects our understanding of what we deliver for the investment of our revenue. Performance is the measurable reflection of the quality and productivity that translates our aspirations for achievement into reality.

Performance comes in many forms. It includes faculty winning national grants and contracts from the NSF and the NIH or publishing articles in national peer reviewed journals; or students earning admission to medical, law, or graduate school. It appears in books published in distinguished peer reviewed presses and art works displayed in nationally reviewed exhibitions or galleries. We see it when students and faculty win prizes in music, the arts, humanities, sciences, or the professions; and when our graduates take positions in high value careers. It exists when our athletic teams excel in national competition. Performance

includes many competitively referenced indicators of distinction in teaching, research, and service.

Performance requires not only peaks of distinction but also the continuous high productivity of an effective institution. Many great classes taught, not just one. Many students inspired to perform well, not just a few. A lifetime of faculty research contributed, not just one outstanding scholarly article. Performance requires constant improvement measured by our own and our national competitors' achievements.

We are an investment opportunity, not a charity. Money matters and performance counts are phrases that reflect the essential relationship between resources and achievement that characterize all first rank American research universities. High performing research universities deliver a magnificent return on the funds invested in them. As they do more with the money they have, they attract others to invest. Each time we speak to a donor about an endowed chair, a building project, or a scholarship fund we talk about an investment.

Each investment takes on substance as we measure our performance. How much new research and teaching and what new programs appear with the professorship? How does an investment result in more publications, grants, students, dissertations, or other results?

An investment in our university is also an act of faith. If we perform, we can show the good works that accompany that act of faith by the alumni, donors, legislators, and parents who invest in us. Each time we perform well and demonstrate that the university speaks to measurable and substantial achievement, we increase our ability to attract additional revenue--more of the money that matters. Performance and

money represent the binary pair required to improve a great university and keep it in competition with the best.

Success in the research university competition, however, confronts the formidable enemy of time. Time is a great obstacle to university improvement. What we need to do, we need to do yesterday, at the latest tomorrow. Not the day after, not next week, not next year, but now. Time is the enemy because the university world is so competitive and each day offers an opportunity we must take, a challenge we must meet.

If we qualify for a foundation grant we must apply, or someone else will get the grant. If a student considers our campus we must reach out to her, or she will go somewhere else. If a faculty member has an outside offer we must respond, or we will lose her. If a donor has the capacity to give we must ask, or his gift will go elsewhere.

Time is the enemy. If our buildings decline, their restoration will cost much more; if our faculty and staff salaries fall behind, the recovery will be slow and expensive; if our student life is unchallenging, first rank applicants will go elsewhere and student quality will decline.

Time comes in many units. For the institution, time is endless; universities live forever. For students, however, time comes in irreplaceable four-year blocks, a year representing a quarter of university life for each of them. Faculty and staff measure time in multiple years throughout their careers, experienced through the work that they do. Research faculty, students, and staff, for example, seeking to discover what is new, experience time in relation to the speed of work done by others who compete in their field.

Sometimes the complexity of university time confuses observers who think we have the time to do anything we like. Not so. We must raise the money today so we can spend it tomorrow to have the program our students need next semester. We renovate the laboratory today so our faculty can do the research required for them to renew their grants tomorrow. We enhance the campus' appearance today so that our prospective students will see a reflection of our quality when they visit tomorrow. We fund our faculty and staff salaries today, so we can remain competitive in the faculty marketplace tomorrow. We serve our community today, so our society will prosper tomorrow.

If money matters, performance counts, and time is the enemy, how then do we know what to do first? The answer is simple; we focus on the academic imperative.

University life involves a constant sequence of choices. We are a community of people who have an abundance of ideas, proposals, and projects. Even if we discard those that are too grand to be reasonable, we still have an endless supply of superior ideas. We cannot do them all, we must choose. Through these choices, we define the scope of our work, the range of our intellectual concerns, and the character of our activities.

Whatever choices we make, however, we never stray far from the academic imperative, the fundamental values of the university: teaching and research. This is what we do, this is the center of our existence, and this is what describes our mission. Before we can do anything else, before we can reach for grand designs and society-changing influence, we must teach our students well and do our research effectively.

This place we call UMass Amherst, where we embrace the academic imperative, is the founding campus of the University of Massachusetts, and the system's flagship institution. We carry a proud tradition of academic achievement and enjoy a high national reputation for the quality of our programs. This is a classic American research university.

Yet, we are clearly an institution challenged. Our faculty, intellectually powerful and committed to superb teaching and research, stand today in numbers insufficient to sustain the university's mission. Our students, eager to succeed, stand today within a university whose exceptional quality is at risk. Our staff, performing at levels beyond the ordinary, stand today depleted in numbers sufficient to maintain their commitment to service. Our facilities, ranging from excellent to poor, stand today barely adequate to contain the quality programs that define our reputation. We, in Amherst, have a significant challenge.

This place, so central to our academic lives and so important to all who engage it, must acquire the resources needed to sustain and enhance its performance and national competitiveness. This place has the people and the talent necessary for its success. The only question is our will to succeed, our commitment to the process, and our determination to remain nationally competitive.

Each of the challenges we face—rebuilding faculty and staff strength, sustaining and enhancing student life, and restoring our physical resources—requires us to make choices. The most important choice we make, however, is to choose our campus. Each of us has a micro constituency we could choose to serve, and each of us could define the center of our professional lives within these micro constituencies. Each of

us has individual needs, goals, aspirations, and requirements. We could seek to improve our personal or group's short-term advantage by attacking each other, by seeking ways to shift resources from one part of our campus to another, by looking outside the university for the leverage to distort internal allocations of resources. We could cannibalize each other in a short-term attempt to sustain an individual or group advantage.

Or, we can choose to define our lives in terms of our campus. We can choose to build on the exceptional base of faculty, staff, and student talent that make the University of Massachusetts Amherst the classic flagship national research university that it must remain. With enthusiasm, commitment, and optimism, Cathryn and I choose this campus as our home and its people as our community.

We all know that to sustain this classic research university we must make choices and take risks. We will borrow money to rebuild our physical infrastructure. We will work endlessly to mobilize our alumni and friends to invest in us. We will hire the best faculty and staff in the nation to rebuild our strength. We will enhance our student life to ensure the continued improvement of our student body.

We will do this the only way possible, together. We will attack the challenges that face this campus, not each other. We will identify as many friends and supporters outside the campus as possible and persuade

them that our performance justifies an investment. We do good work here, but no one owes us an investment. It is our good work that earns us the confidence of our fellow citizens, our legislators, our students and parents, our alumni and friends.

We will choose the culture of achievement over the culture of complaint. Complaint is easy, it is self indulgent, and it earns few friends. Achievement is hard, but it attracts support and earns respect. Life has many disappointments and none of us has a monopoly on expectations unfulfilled. Those whose support we must have for our future will come when we persuade them that our achievements are for their benefit, not just our own; that our work is central to their success, not just our own; and that our respect is for the circumstances of their lives, not just our own.

We fight for the future of this classic American research university here in Amherst, recognizing that we have the people and the talent, the support of our president and trustees, the power of our alumni and friends, and the interests of the Commonwealth at heart. We fight for the future of UMass Amherst's academic imperative knowing that our performance will command the resources we need in time for our future.

With all your help, your commitment, and your determination, we will succeed.

Thank you.