Chancellor’s First Hundred Day Message to the Campus Community

Dear members of the UMass Dartmouth community:

Since arriving in July, I have immersed myself in learning about all aspects of UMass Dartmouth and the region. My initial activities have focused on building connections to students, faculty, staff, and alumni; speaking with area leaders to understand the complex regional dynamics; getting to know the main campus and satellite facilities; and assessing the leadership team.

In September, I began a 45-day listening tour: Inventing our Future: Vision 2025, Campus & Community Conversations. These small group conversations with about 30 internal and external constituent groups have been designed to solicit a variety of perspectives about UMassD’s optimal future state and encourage possibility thinking. Our conversations are helping to identify areas of strategic focus and chart a shared ambition for UMassD’s future. This will lead into the next strategic planning cycle, which begins in January, to create the plan that carries us to 2025. I will present introductory findings at a Town Hall meeting in December and, at my inauguration in April, will articulate the institution’s strategic direction.

Initial Impressions:
My initial impressions over the past 100 days, from a macro view, include strong positives along with some challenges. They are:

- Our “Doctoral University” Carnegie classification and Tier 1 National Research University ranking by U.S. News & World Report put us in the top 10 percent among all four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. and provide us an exceptional opportunity.
- Our programs, faculty, staff, and students are our greatest assets. Our students can hold their own with anyone, anywhere. We have a talented faculty of scholars, researchers, and teachers, who are mentors and advocates for students, and our dedicated staff helps our institution grow.
- In recent years, the university has made tough decisions to maintain a healthy financial position. Infrastructure needs are significant and pressing. The only capital investment the Commonwealth has made in a major facility on the main campus was in the 1980s; that was the Claire T. Carney Library.
- The University has experienced declining enrollments. We must remediate recruitment and retention issues and work strategically to recruit and retain students, who will persist until degree completion and go on to succeed in their chosen career and educational paths.
Leadership, clear strategic direction, and focus are critical to our success. I have been assessing and considering the assets of the leadership team, organizational structure, and optimal configuration and staffing of the Chancellor’s Office, among others. We are conducting an external assessment of Student Affairs and national searches for key leadership positions, among them vice chancellor for university advancement and chief of staff. Once the leadership structure is finalized in January, we will make changes to the organizational structure based on the new leadership model and, by the end of the third quarter, align the budget with the organizational changes.

To strengthen our market position, we need to develop a strong brand identity and a clearly delineated value proposition.

Areas of Strategic Focus:

Areas of strategic focus that require sustained attention over the coming year and as part of the next phase of strategic planning include:

- Driving innovation in academic programming
- Building a research infrastructure with strategic focus
- Creating a strategic enrollment plan and process
- Building a sustainable financial model
- Building a compelling brand identity and national reputation
- Building a culture of philanthropy
- Building a positive institutional culture and campus pride
- Encouraging economic development based on the University’s educational and research initiatives
- Addressing the massive infrastructure challenges, from academic facilities to housing.

UMass Dartmouth is a great university delivering a private university experience at a public value. Dedication to future-oriented strategic thinking will make the University even better. It is possible for us to be a world-class organization that competes on all levels and prepares graduates to contribute to the global community. Anchored by our vision, mission, and core values, we can deliver an exceptional student experience and position UMassD as a model for public higher education. I am confident that our collective resolve and commitment will lead our university to new heights.

Best regards,

Robert E. Johnson, Ph.D.