To the Amherst College Community:

I want to thank you all again for your thoughtful engagement in the difficult discussions about our economic situation during this past year. The Trustees join me in gratefully acknowledging a remarkable process that has upheld Amherst’s tradition of inclusive and informed deliberations. How we make collective decisions and govern ourselves is a hallmark of our values, consistent with our educational mission broadly understood. Even amidst our disagreements, everyone has sought to ensure what is best for the College and its community and to remain respectful of one another. The level of consensus among the reports of the various committees and of the Advisory Budget Committee (ABC) powerfully suggests that our processes have brought us together in support of our mission.

The Trustees have discussed the ABC report and agree that the administration should now implement its recommendations for additional short-term budgetary adjustments. This plan enables Amherst to preserve and strengthen its essential values. The College will maintain and hire an extraordinary faculty of teacher-scholars, who are at the core of our educational enterprise, ensuring access for the most talented and most broadly experienced students regardless of their ability to pay, and maintain an excellent staff.

The ABC’s plan focuses on the next three years, and will allow Amherst to avoid many painful measures we had feared, such as staff layoffs, almost completely. But as the ABC noted, the plan does not fully meet the challenges of subsequent years. The Trustees look forward to continuing the conversation with campus committees about the challenges ahead when they meet in Amherst in October. In the meantime, the plan outlined by the ABC will set Amherst on a course that begins to meet these challenges, while maintaining our values and commitments.

Maintaining Amherst’s Outstanding Faculty

The quality of our faculty is essential to ensuring the engaged learning community that Amherst provides. The College must continue to have a faculty of great teachers informed by excellent scholarship, for they are the lifeblood of our enterprise. Amherst must have a tenure-line faculty that can maintain its curriculum and engage in curricular innovation, as for example in interdisciplinary areas and first-year seminars. Amherst must therefore work hard to fill regular faculty positions up to the maximum number previously budgeted. This is a goal the College had not reached in times of more resources, but Amherst must redouble its efforts to do so now, focusing on regular faculty appointments, as these provide the base for our educational, scholarly and advising activities. These tenure-track appointments will effectively replace some visiting positions. Crucially, the College will still maintain a small student-faculty ratio; with the new hiring plan, by 2012 the tenure-line faculty will have grown by 15.3 percent since 1999 (or by 18.6 percent for all faculty), a period during which student enrollment will have grown by 7.7 percent.
Staff Levels

Maintaining a high-quality staff is also essential to our educational enterprise. While Amherst is leaner in its staffing than many of its peers, it has also seen significant growth in its workforce—the staff, including administration, has increased by 133 positions, or 28 percent, over the last decade. Although Amherst will reduce its staff and administration by about 40 positions, the College is well positioned to make this reduction mainly through attrition and voluntary retirements. There are currently 36 unfilled staff and administrative positions across campus. The managers of relevant departments or units and the senior staff are evaluating which of these positions can remain unfilled and how the College might be organized more efficiently. Some of these positions must be filled and I have already authorized several essential replacements, as for example in the library. Amherst will now resume hiring where deemed necessary. I hope that some vacant positions can be filled from among the current staff, redeploying colleagues to where they are most needed. But having increased the staff and administration at a greater rate than the faculty over the last generation, the College will now fill empty faculty positions faster than it replaces staff.

Even though this approach is much preferable to layoffs, I do not want to suggest that reductions in staffing through attrition or retirements will be easy. Some departments have already experienced considerable staff reductions, and reorganization may result in some further reductions. For instance, units supported by external funds, such as the Center for Community Engagement, have had to reduce staffing as those funds have diminished, and will continue to do so. I also recognize that, even though attrition and retirements will allow us to begin to redeploy staff and resume hiring, this process will take some time. Reductions in non-salary budgets will not make it easier to adjust to these changes. I hope we can all be patient and understanding with each other in areas of diminished services, even as we continue to respect and expect the extraordinary efforts of our staff colleagues. I will look for additional ways to work with the staff to ensure their ongoing engagement in College governance.

Compensation

Of course, faculty and staff are affected not only by “headcount” but also by compensation. This year of frozen salary pools will be challenging, but the College will provide additional support to lower-paid staff members who are most vulnerable under such circumstances. I expect to resume salary increases after this year, even if these may be more modest than in the past. However, the Board will make these decisions annually depending on economic conditions, with the aim of continuing to attract and reward the best faculty and staff, and within the framework of the equal salary pool percentage increases proposed by the ABC for the next three years. Salary pool increases set by the Trustees each year will then be allocated individually according to past practice. We will not now return to salary reductions for tenured or tenure-track faculty on research sabbaticals.

Maintaining the College’s Commitment to Access

Amherst has an historical commitment to enrolling the best possible students. It is for their education that we are here. We can all take pride in the success of the College and our Admission office in making Amherst one of the most selective colleges in the land and in attracting students who are at the top of their varied cohorts academically and represent a wide range of interests. A broader pool has helped the College avoid the loss of applicants that our peers have recently
experienced, and has allowed Amherst to be more selective—the College has seen a rise in academic standards for admission even in this challenging year. This is in part because Amherst has been and remains a leader in meeting financial need and in not excluding students who require significant support. Without that distinction, Amherst would see a decrease in our vibrancy and quality. I believe that Amherst should remain an “equal opportunity enrollment” institution. Amidst our debates, no one has argued that Amherst should significantly reduce aid, especially during the current recession. That would increase the challenges middle- and low-income families face in paying for college, especially if they will be further pressed by increases in the comprehensive fee. Were the College to select students with a preference for those who can afford to pay more, purposefully reducing the percentage on aid, Amherst’s mission would be compromised and the College would see a decrease in the quality of its students, including international students, who bring important experiences, insights, and talents to campus. Accordingly, the ABC’s plan calls for maintaining current admission and aid polices that will likely result in stable, not declining and not increasing, percentages of students on aid, while allowing for some reduction in the aid budget. I agree with the ABC that we should strive to accomplish this without compromising on access, and note the strategies for achieving that outlined by the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial Aid. College committees and the Trustees will continue to assess and debate such options and will no doubt continue to face difficult choices in years to come.

**Facilities to Support our Learning Community**

The College also faces serious choices in terms of facilities. Amherst will not be able to meet all aspirations for renovations or new buildings, though it is important to ensure that facilities support our educational mission. Planning for the sciences, especially for addressing the deterioration of Merrill Science Center, will continue. Planning for other projects is not now continuing. Reopening the Lord Jeffery Inn would benefit the College and the town, but to minimize potential outlays, Amherst is seeking an investment partner and reducing project costs.

**Next Steps**

I will keep the campus apprised of progress as we move forward to implement the ABC’s recommendations over the coming year. In the next few weeks, Human Resources will provide more specific information to all employees about incentives for voluntary retirement and special payments for lower-paid staff, and I will advise managers about the process for requesting that replacements be authorized for open positions.

Thank you all again for your patience and assistance as the College has responded to this crisis. I continue to be impressed with the dedication of this community to find solutions that maintain excellence and are equitable, rather than pitting those qualities against each other. The result has been a renewed appreciation that it is Amherst’s people and culture that make it great, more so than its wealth. For this, we can all be grateful.

Yours,

[Signature]

Anthony W. Marx
President