



January 29, 2009

Dear members of the Board of Trustees:

I know you have been inundated with position papers, data, and the like regarding the present financial crisis at UVM, so I'll keep this as brief as I can. The central concern before the administration is how to maintain academic quality at UVM and move forward to our goal of becoming a premier small research university while also reestablishing financial viability. United Academics, the union representing most faculty at the University of Vermont, shares that concern, but we view the administration's response to the financial crisis as seriously threatening the quality of education and services to students. Some prominent faculty who have long been strong supporters of UVM are now questioning whether they can, in good conscience, stand in front of prospective students and tell them that this university still offers a high-quality education.

Shortly after announcing a projected \$22 to \$28 million budget deficit for FY10, the UVM administration sent to academic deans reduction targets ranging from 4.75 to 8 percent of current instructional budgets. At the same time, the administration asserted that academic quality and student experience would not be jeopardized. However, one cannot leave vacant professor positions unfilled, eliminate lecturer jobs, increase student enrollment by 300, institute substantially more large-enrollment courses, and encourage increased use of graduate teaching assistants and undergraduate graders without undercutting the present student-faculty relationship and quality instruction and research.

Pointing to their flawed student-faculty target ratio, President Fogel and his administration contend that there are too many faculty teaching at UVM. In actual fact, the growth in tenure-track hiring has failed to keep pace with enrollment growth in the past six years (the student body increasing by 30 percent while tenure-track hiring grew at less than half that rate). Students are already experiencing diminished access to long-term faculty, and the present push towards larger class sizes, including the creation of many more 150-250 student lecture classes, will exacerbate this trend. But, there is more on the horizon than just large lecture classes. Now, as deans scramble to meet budget- and faculty-reduction targets, they are advising their faculty to brace for further changes next fall including:

- a freeze on or the elimination of almost all vacant or vacated tenure/tenure-track positions which will leave many upper level courses without faculty;
- the reduction in or elimination of a department's full-time and/or part-time lecturers;
- the collapsing of two sections of a course into one moderately large one;
- the reduction and elimination of the university's only first-year composition course;
- the elimination of course releases for faculty who coordinate academic programs;

- a reliance on undergraduate “teaching assistants” to lead large discussion sections and grade exams.

These sorts of budget-cutting measures place our specialness and value in jeopardy and, we fear, will cause students and future applicants to question whether UVM is worth the high tuition costs.

At the same time, UVM’s administration continues to place a premium on upper-level administrators, while refusing to present any standard for evaluating the heavy investment in these positions. From 2001 to 2007, according to UVM’s base salary data, executive salary spending (for deans, vice presidents, vice provosts, provost, and president and their associates) more than doubled, from just above \$2.5 million to \$5.4 million. To help put this heavy investment in administration in perspective, consider that in this same period, the share of tuition revenues devoted to salaries for represented faculty *fell* by 12 percent.

There *are* alternatives to expanding the student body and hiking tuition while cutting faculty and staff that our administration should be considering. These alternatives are being taken up by other U.S. colleges and universities seeking to maintain long-term quality through a challenging financial period. They include:

- extending the period of structural readjustment so that the deficit accumulated during President Fogel’s tenure is dealt with not in three semesters but over six or nine;
- as recommended in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, consider drawing on a small percentage of our endowment. While the endowment is not a rainy day fund, one time emergency use might save UVM from faculty and staff cuts which will seriously damage the quality of education;
- reducing substantially the expenditures on the large number of very highly paid administrators on whose watch this budget shortfall was created.

It is the faculty who are being called on to save our university by digging deeper, taking on more responsibilities, and continuing to perform at a high level of excellence. Faculty are not the source of the financial problem and should not be the target of major cuts. Quite the contrary, faculty are the principal instrument that will be needed to enable this university to survive with quality and integrity.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The United Academics Executive Council:

David Shiman, Education, President

Sara Solnick, Economics, Vice President

Tom Streeter, Sociology, Secretary

Jackie Weinstock, Integrated Professional Studies, Treasurer

Linda Berlin, Nutrition and Food Sciences; Beth Haggart, Art; and Stephanie Kaza, Rubenstein School; At Large

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