



Oct. 23, 2020

## An Open Letter from United Academics

On Oct. 19, University of Vermont staff received a letter from Mary Brodsky, Director of Labor Relations and Employment Services, that was designed to sow division and mistrust between staff and faculty. The letter came just after UVM's faculty union, United Academics, declared impasse in contract negotiations with the administration, and at a time of growing momentum among staff for a collective voice in decision making.

We respect facts, and we know that it matters how we deploy them. Brodsky's letter distorted facts in order to flame emotions around sensitive issues like pay and job security.

Brodsky claimed to staff, misleadingly, that a full professor's base pay is, on average, \$127,380. That mean average includes tenured full professors only, who comprise just 21 percent of UVM full time faculty, and is skewed by the high salaries of administrators who return to faculty.

A median salary would be more accurate, but for consistency with Brodsky's mean average:

- The average (mean) salary across all full-time faculty is actually \$89,755.
- The average (mean) salary for non-tenure-track faculty is \$69,730. Non-tenure track faculty members comprise 45 percent of all full time faculty and teach 51 percent of UVM's courses.

Again, because top earners are folded into the mean, these numbers are still about 5 percent higher than a more accurate median average.

Completely unacknowledged in the letter from Labor Relations is the fact that our union, recognizing the potential financial impacts of a pandemic, did propose one-time, progressive salary cuts in June. The administration rejected it. Our union then also proposed a one-year salary freeze followed by modest salary increases and preserving benefits. The administration rejected it. We had also offered to pause negotiations and extend our current contract for a year -- also rejected.

All this is important because the administration is using misleading numbers to argue that United Academics' salary proposals would lead to layoffs, when the reality is that UVM's enrollment numbers have stayed strong despite the pandemic, and our salary proposals have provided the administration with multiple opportunities to see immediate savings in light of Covid-related economic concerns. This makes it clear that they are looking to roll back faculty and staff salaries and benefits for the long term and that they're using the pandemic as an opportunity.

Even using Brodsky's distorted numbers, this administration is still demanding cuts to faculty compensation that are far higher and more permanent than those taken by the top salaried executive administration, who continue to receive salaries of between \$200-\$500K plus deferred compensation, and full retirement contributions while they propose to eliminate retirement for two years for faculty and staff.

The administration's memo is accurate in one regard. Our bargaining team did return to the bargaining table seven weeks after our last meeting with the administration's team, it's true. We are a democratic union, and our team took time to make sure we understood what our membership wanted. We worked to gather this information during the first six weeks of fall teaching during a pandemic, while awaiting UVM's enrollment and budget numbers, and when **our first and foremost priority is doing our jobs and supporting our students.**

"Staff should not have to disproportionately bear the brunt of faculty demands," wrote the administration. But our staff colleagues are intelligent, and understand that UVM's faculty are partners in solidarity, and not an enemy. We consider ourselves partners to the administration as well, although under the current administration, we have been treated as an adversary or an afterthought: in bargaining, in our response to teaching during a pandemic, and in the tone of communications such as Brodsky's.

In our Common Ground statement of core values, UVM prioritizes respect, integrity, innovation, openness and justice. Our faculty union remains aligned with our core values and continues to uphold them on behalf of ourselves, our students, and our entire UVM community.