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### **University of Vermont Faculty and Staff Unions Announce Goals for Contract Negotiations with UVM Administration**

*Burlington, Vt:* Two University of Vermont unions are entering negotiations with the UVM administration this winter. United Academics, the faculty union, and UVM Staff United, the clerical, technical, specialized and professional staff union, together represent 2,200 UVM employees. United Academics launches bargaining this Friday, February 2 to establish a new collective bargaining agreement for the next three years. UVM Staff United bargaining begins February 13.

UVM has admitted record high numbers of students in the past three years; at the same time, hiring and retention of both faculty and staff has stagnated or shrunk. With job positions left unfilled or cut, staff and faculty are shouldering a heavier burden of work supporting more students.

Faculty and staff compensation have not kept pace with an increased cost of living in the Burlington area, caused primarily by inflation and a severe lack of affordable housing. The entry wage for full-time UVM lecturers who started during the 2023-2024 academic year is below what is considered a living wage in Chittenden County. Over half of staff do not make enough to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Burlington. Meanwhile, the salaries of executive administrators at the top have continued to balloon.

In addition, the UVM administration has routinely ignored the terms it agreed to in both unions' existing collective bargaining agreements, leading to an unprecedented number of grievances filed by each labor group over the last several years.

As contract bargaining begins, the faculty union's top priorities are salary raises and the preservation of benefits. The faculty union also seeks increased equity for non-tenure track faculty, who are called lecturers. Lecturers make up roughly a third of the full-time faculty at UVM. They have short-term contracts, extremely heavy teaching loads, minimal job security and earn substantially lower salaries than tenured faculty. Lecturers also have access to fewer

benefits than other faculty, including shorter parental leave and a two-year waiting period to access retirement benefits.

“UVM faculty are committed to providing our students a world class education, but cannot fulfill our responsibility to our students or our families within the current climate. It is irresponsible to ask faculty members to shoulder this economic burden while disregarding both our professionalism and the terms of our current bargaining agreement,” stated UA president and associate professor of social work Suzy Comerford. “Our union negotiates in good faith. We call for the UVM administration to do the same.”

The staff union’s contract negotiations will focus on winning a clear and transparent wage and career progression system that allows staff to plan for their futures, which, they say, will promote better retention and recruitment at UVM. Staff union representatives say that livable, sustainable wages will go a long way toward making UVM a place where staff can work now and in the future.

“UVM staff won a \$20 minimum wage in its first contract in 2022. Although a great step forward, we’ve watched as housing prices have outpaced any gains we’ve made, and rising health insurance premiums eat away at our take-home pay. A full time worker at UVM ought to be able to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Chittenden County, and ought to have a predictable path to financial stability and retirement after dedicating their labor to making UVM a great university. Achieving that will make UVM a great place to work,” stated Ellen Kaye, UVM Staff United co-president.

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**About United Academics:** UVM United Academics represents over 700 full-time and 100 part-time faculty at UVM and is affiliated with AFT Vermont, which represents over 9,000 higher education and healthcare professionals in Vermont, and AAUP.

**About UVM Staff United:** UVMSU represents over 1,400 staff members at UVM and is affiliated with AFT Vermont, which represents over 9,000 higher education and healthcare professionals in Vermont.