



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

December 7, 2020

TO: Dr. William Falls, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Vermont

RE: Letter in Support of the Department of Classics at the University of Vermont

The Department of Classics at University of Tennessee, Knoxville, expresses its support to the Department of Classics and other departments and programs at the University of Vermont that are currently being considered for cancellation.

The proposed cancellation, as described in a December 2 article in *Vermont Business Magazine* (which includes the letter by Dean Falls to UVM College Faculty and Staff), explains the extent of the UVM College's proposed cuts as motivated by budgetary concerns. However, the justification as stated raises certain questions. The proposed cuts are described as following a "data-informed process," yet there is little explanation behind the criteria chosen, which are focused on three-year averages of majors, minors, and degrees conferred for undergraduate programs, as well as numbers of students and degrees conferred for graduate programs.

Furthermore, the choice of quantities of majors/minors/degrees conferred splits the UVM Department of Classics' student constituency into three "low-enrolling" subgroups, thereby guaranteeing that the entire department falls under a rating of "low- enrollment." Moreover, the data used for this decision are enrollments from 2010-2016, which were the years after the Great Recession, when humanities across the country suffered a decline in student interest for economic reasons. Longer-term data at the University of Tennessee show that enrollments in the humanities are cyclical, and our current uptick in Classics enrollments is the result of the University's support of our department. Furthermore, the numbers of majors and minors should not be the only statistics by which to measure the impact of a Classics department. The reach of any department's courses extends to the broader campus community, not just to its own majors and minors, meaning that the impact of the Department's closure would be felt well beyond the constituencies who are listed in the established criteria.

Questions over practical criteria are, however, minor with respect to the damage that would come with the closures of Departments of Classics, Religion, and Geology. The primary value of a university education, especially a public university education, lies in the guarantee of the availability of a wide variety of programs of study to the general public. The field of Classics in the United States has advanced significantly through the contributions of students and scholars who have matriculated through public universities, as these institutions tend to train a more diverse constituency. Moreover, individual institutions bring something unique to their own disciplines. The Department of Classics at the University of Vermont houses specialists in interpreting the primary

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evidence for the literature, philosophy, and civilization of ancient Greece and Rome, which have been influential if not foundational for many subsequent societies and cultures beyond the ancient Mediterranean. Eliminating such a department would mean cutting students off from this basic expertise.

Departmental closures are highly destructive acts, not only to faculty and staff, but also to disciplines as a whole. They represent the far-reaching loss of a future path for students, the next generation of leaders and scholars, who are going to be deprived of courses of study which their predecessors were able to take for granted.

We ask that the dean and provost reconsider the long-term ramifications that closing the Department of Classics, and others, will have, both for the benefit of UVM students and for the contributions which UVM faculty and students make to our field.

For the UT Classics faculty,



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