

Statement by Helen Morgan-Parmett to UVM Board of Trustees, September 25, 2020

Thank you for inviting me to speak. I am the Edwin W. Lawrence Professor of Forensics, Associate Professor in Theatre, Dance, & Speech, affiliate faculty in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies and Film and Television Studies, and Director of the Lawrence Debate Union. I am also a graduate of the University of Vermont and was myself a member of our esteemed debate team. I love UVM—it was here, as the first person in my family to attend college, that I found my voice, and the first place I ever truly felt at home.

This sense of finding one's place is why I am so deeply concerned over the University's, frankly, abysmal record on attracting and especially retaining faculty of color. This year alone, four faculty of color have chosen to leave UVM, including my department chair, a mentor and friend, Gregory Ramos. Although faculty choose to leave for a variety of reasons, the record of UVM's failure to retain faculty of color speaks to a trend that cannot be coincidental.

The loss of these faculty is a loss for everyone. Faculty diversity is more than just giving marginalized folks opportunities—people who experience marginalization are more likely to ask different questions and diverse perspectives to their work. In my class this week, for example, I taught students about the cutting edge work of Black biologists whose inquiries into systemic oppression brought to light how intergenerational trauma is passed down genetically, and transbiologists too have produced groundbreaking work by asking how we go about classifying and categorizing biological sex characteristics. When we lose faculty of color, not only is UVM's reputation hurt, but we are all losing out on their enriching insights, questions, and perspectives. Furthermore, the retreat of faculty of color creates an alarming blindspot in practice-based teaching in the fields of theatre, dance, and speech in particular, where the main focus is on exploring embodied representation. There is no way to represent the world in which we live in an embodied way when over 95% of our students and most of our faculty are white.

It is no secret why faculty of color leave UVM—these answers are compiled yearly in the climate survey and the exit interviews of these faculty. Faculty of color throughout the US are also vocal in media on the ways in which they are systemically undervalued and marginalized in the academy—and although individual acts of marginalization and microaggressions undoubtedly constitute some of those reasons, these too speak to larger systemic issues in which faculty of color are consistently underpaid, undervalued, overworked particularly in service, and under-supported in comparison to their white counterparts.

One solution I would like to highlight as we move forward—putting resources into the existing entities on campus that do anti-racism work, including GSWS, CRES, and the identity centers. I am excited to see that there are resources being allocated to implement anti-racism across the curriculum, including for bringing in folks to help disciplines to bring anti-racism into their curriculums. However, I am concerned that the current resource allocation does not provide funding for the existing institutions on

campus who have long been doing this work. GSWS and CRES in particular are programs that are consistently underfunded, having to beg departments to release faculty members to teach their core courses each semester. Their class sizes have been increased, despite the fact that research proves more intimate seminar style discussions promote greater awareness, growth, and learning on anti-racism. I hope that as the University considers how it will spend resources devoted to anti-racism that these two programs will receive the recognition and support they deserve. What concerns me most, however, is the way in which we proceed in response to this crisis and the financial choices we make risks creating an even more unequal effect on faculty of color that will continue to affect our ability to attract and retain faculty of color in a moment when their voices are needed the most.