

Statement by Susan Comerford to UVM Board of Trustees, September 25, 2020

Good Morning, My name is Susan Comerford, I am a faculty member and the Vice President of your faculty's union, United Academics. This morning, I would like to address the frayed, strained relations that currently exist between the administration and various constituencies on campus.

Is what is viewed as a Scorched Earth Approach to faculty and staff, the people who actually teach and support the development of our students, really what we want here at UVM? Do you, as TRUSTEES understand the depth of damage that has been done to relations between faculty, staff, administration and trustees over the last few years? Trust has been seriously broken.

The UVM of today is a pale reflection of the institution where I chose to throw in my professional lot. I did so because UVM held, and actually aspired to, values that inspired me, human rights, social justice values, and importantly, our Common Ground.

In the last few years, and in particular last year, our cherished institution has squandered the good will and the Esprit de Coeur of the very souls whose tireless commitment has maintained our university through thick and thin, as administrators have come and gone.

- TRUSTEE Colleagues, shared governance at UVM is in tatters. Rather than mutual collaboration for the benefit of our beloved UVM, faculty and staff leaders have become an afterthought, only invited in by the administration in token numbers when forced under pressure. Where is the **RESPECT** in this?
- TRUSTEE Colleagues, you hired a new president without true faculty and staff vetting, thus breaking trust with faculty and staff. Where is the **OPPENNESS** here?
- Our institution professes resistance to all forms of injustice, we seek to reject bigotry, oppression, degradation, and harassment, and we aspire to challenge injustice toward any member of our community. Yet, the Black Lives Matter flag was removed from the flag pole in front of the Davis Center, again with no discussion, in the midst of a massive movement for racial justice. Where is the **JUSTICE** in this?
- The administration closed the Campus Children's Center with no consultation with the faculty and staff most affected, the parents. Despite many attempts, there was no response from the President. Where is the **RESPECT** in that?
- This past Wednesday is the latest example of the meanness of spirit that marks this administration, the very same meanness of spirit and disingenuousness approach we see in our national government. When our faculty union reluctantly came to the decision to declare impasse in Impact Bargaining, and the

administration's Chief Negotiator asks for extra time to consider additional proposals, and we agree, The UVM administration instead moves to use the time to construct and send press releases to seek advantage in the public square. What happened to the fairness, straightforward conduct, the **INTEGRITY** in this?

- I've been a faculty member here for over 20 years. As such, I and others, have written multiple times to every president on issues of import. Each president has out of respect for that colleague has responded, until now.

We care deeply about this institution, and the students we serve, and the community we live in. As so eloquently stated in Our Common Ground, we ARE personally and collectively **responsible** for our words and deeds. Damage has been done to our collective relationships. If we are to uphold our common ground, we must repair these relationships.