



December 8, 2020

To President Suresh Garimella and the University of Vermont Board of Trustees:

As faculty members at another public institution who have long admired the academic excellence of the University of Vermont, we write to express our strong opposition to your plan to cut core programs in the Liberal Arts. We understand that the University of Vermont is in a precarious financial situation. At the same time, we hope the university can identify other areas where cuts might be made without threatening Liberal Arts faculty positions and the departments that are central to its educational mission. Otherwise, the university risks its ability to fulfill its public responsibility.

We are aware of the high quality of a UVM education as your faculty includes one of our most outstanding graduates, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, who teaches in the Department of Religion. The study of religion provides an invaluable opportunity for exploring the ways in which people find meaning, purpose, and wonder in their lives. Religion is a central component of society, shaping politics, law, history, economics, science, the arts, and more. Through religion, humans give structure to their ethics, personal identities, communities, and understandings of the cosmos around them.

As a public institution, UVM has assumed responsibilities to provide expertise in a wide range of subjects to benefit society. UVM's mission statement calls for preparing "accountable leaders who will bring to their work dedication to the global community." The vision statement promises "a comprehensive commitment to a liberal arts education, environment, health, and public service." The strategic vision endorses "exposure to the humanities—and the critical thought this engenders." Without a Department of Religion and other core disciplines in the Liberal Arts, UVM no longer will be able to fulfill its mission.

We take note of one of UVM's most illustrious alumni, John Dewey; he was also one of the founders of the American Association of University Professors, the key organization that supports the twin principles of academic freedom and shared governance. He would undoubtedly remind you that critical decisions about the future of your university need to be made with full faculty participation.

We thus strongly urge you to reconsider the proposed drastic restructuring of UVM's programs, which may lead to the elimination of faculty positions. We hope UVM can preserve its long tradition of preparing well-rounded graduates to live and work ethically as global citizens.

From faculty members in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

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