



The University of Vermont  
HUMANITIES CENTER

9 December 2020

The UVM Humanities Center decries, in the strongest possible terms, the proposal to eliminate humanities departments and programs in the College of Arts and Sciences. This proposal does not reflect a “comprehensive commitment to a liberal arts education” (UVM Vision statement), and it undermines the value of the Humanities for our students, faculty, state, and status as Vermont's flagship land grant university.

As Vermont Congressman Justin Morrill—architect of the land-grant university system—once expressed, humanities are not marginal to the land grant university but *lie at its very heart*: “The fundamental idea was to offer an opportunity in every state for a liberal and larger education to larger numbers, not merely those destined to enter the sedentary professions, but to those needing higher instruction for the world’s business, for the industrial pursuits and professions of life.” For Morrill, the purpose of the university is not merely technical education; rather it is to create better citizens and strengthen the nation by enriching the human experience.

Through their teaching, research, and public engagement, the faculty of three humanities programs targeted for elimination—Religion, Classics, and Historic Preservation—as well as majors in various foreign languages targeted for elimination, have demonstrated that the Humanities help *all* students from across the University to:

- Understand human experience across language, place, and time
- Empathize with others
- Think creatively and critically
- Examine social problems related to race, gender, sex, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, class, and caste
- Prioritize social justice and equality
- Build skills in inquiry, writing and critical analysis, the so-called “soft-skills” that are in high demand in diverse careers

The proposal to eliminate these programs and majors based on an arbitrary measure like the number of majors is short-sighted and ignores the importance of these programs for the fulfilment of general education requirements for all students from across the university. Given that this proposal is patently about opening the door to cutting faculty positions, it egregiously ignores the contributions faculty in these programs make to Vermont through their public humanities work, consulting, and leadership in areas such as cultural heritage management, secondary education, teacher training, and humanities and arts programming

throughout the state. UVM's latest attempt to "engage" with Vermont would do well to recognize Humanities faculty are already deeply engaged in Vermont's communities through a multitude of humanistic and artistic pursuits. Especially galling is the assault it represents on the accomplishments, productivity, and stature of the faculty who teach in these programs, whose contributions to UVM's national and international reputation are substantial. We have been proud in the Humanities Center to provide direct support and awards to faculty in each of these programs.

Budgets are not apolitical, they are values statements. It is clear from the proposed budgetary cuts that the humanities are not valued at UVM. This is in spite of their inherent merit to our land grant institution, high enrollment courses that serve university mission, and excellent faculty. We question why we cannot invest university resources in academic programs and not bloated administrator salaries, or reform a budget model that systematically produces regular structural deficits to the academic unit that serves the greatest number and variety of students.

Sincerely,



Luis Vivanco, Director



Ilyse Morgenstein-Fuerst, Associate Director