

UVM' s Strategic Vision
Provost Prelock's Remarks

The University of Vermont has a somewhat unique place among American institutions of higher education in that our productivity and scholarly impact is well ahead of public universities of similar size; to students we function more like a private university than a typical state flagship, with 77% of our undergraduate students coming from out of state. Our modest size fosters personal engagement and individualized learning opportunities; our size empowers us to innovate in ways that most public universities are unable to do.

With Vermont as our natural habitat, UVM reflects the best of our state and models what many call *The Vermont Way*. Ultimately, we are committed to solving the most complex challenges of our time that require discovery and innovation in the spaces between traditional academic disciplines such as sustaining healthy ecosystems, improving human health, pursuing scalable solutions to combat climate change, fostering values-based corporate leadership, building resilient communities, and shaping sustainable food systems both regionally and globally, all in a just and equitable manner.

Our more than 13,000 students (13,350; UG-10,688 (77% OOS); GR-1596 (63% OOS); certificates-42 (60% OOS); Medical-475 (74% OOS); nondegree-549 (33% OOS)) and 4200 (4254) Staff (2358) and Faculty (1788) and administrators (108) are passionate, persistent, often outspoken, and most often grounded in real-world experience. Our community respects its history and tradition—yet many are

willing to explore new approaches and take risks if they see we are prioritizing society's wellbeing in the interest of a brighter future.

Over the last four years, research activity at UVM has doubled—you will be hearing more about that from our Vice President for Research tomorrow. Undergraduate applications have been at an all-time high between 28,000 and 30,000 annually for fewer than 3,000 spots. The university has enrolled record-breaking first-year classes in terms of academic quality and diversity in the last couple of years, with more than half of our first-year students coming from outside New England and New York. In this same period, total graduate and medical applications have reached record levels, including promising increases in international applicants and countries represented.

As the university's Chief Academic Officer, I have the privilege of highlighting the important scholarly touchstones that guide our work as a campus community.

The first is **Amplifying Our Impact**, which is President Garimella's strategic vision for the University of Vermont. In this vision he outlines a three-pronged approach:

- The first is to ensure Student Success. We do this by offering a vibrant educational experience including internships, study abroad, undergraduate research opportunities, and service learning; we have created a culture of strong faculty mentorship; we offer professional advising; we are

committed to affordability and accessibility; and we provide career support and opportunity well beyond graduation day.

- The second is to invest in our Distinctive Research Strengths. We have a liberal arts core with the academic resources of a comprehensive research institution. This dual nature positions our faculty as leaders across multiple disciplines that support investigation and discovery in areas key to the university's reach and reputation. We focus on building Healthy Societies through our cross-disciplinary work that drives actions to address substance abuse prevention and rehabilitation; immunobiology, microbiology, and infectious disease treatment; vaccine testing; and public health campaigns. We also focus on contributing to a Healthy Environment by creating knowledge around best practices for sustainable farming; food systems and business solutions; and, the protection of water systems. We also leverage our strength in engineering, machine learning and complex systems to develop scalable solutions.
- And the third is to fulfill our Land Grant Mission. As one of the nation's first land grant institutions our alignment with the state is critical. Our engagement with the state not only helps Vermont but benefits our university by strengthening its connection to entrepreneurship, hands-on learning, problem-solving and critical thinking, all ideals championed by our alumnus, educator, and noted philosopher John Dewey. We are working to help our Vermonter community tackle everything from farm viability to complex environmental issues to public health to business growth.

Our focus on these three strategic imperatives supports our students, our state, and our success as an institution, and at the same time, it requires our commitment, collaboration, and collective action.

The Provost's Office has also developed **Academic Success Goals** which were designed to help operationalize President Garimella's strategic areas of impact. They reflect our priorities in Teaching and Learning, Knowledge Creation, and Engagement.

We have established specific goals, identified metrics to measure our success, defined our baseline performance, and developed a dashboard so we can measure our progress.

Our Academic Success Goals can be found on the Provost's Office website, and we ask our faculty and staff to really use these goals to help them understand how each member of our community can and will contribute to our highest academic priorities.

As Chief Academic Officer leading a team of doers and innovators, we have recently embarked on several university-wide initiatives. We have established a focus on **academic integration** or what the American Association of Colleges and Universities describe as **integrative learning**. Our approach to Integrative learning is that students build their knowledge across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas

and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus.

Our goal is to coordinate the work of staff and faculty partners across the institution to ensure our students have the classroom, research, internship, service, and social opportunities that prepare them for intellectual engagement and success during and after college.

We envision our integrative learning emphasis will:

- contribute to students' holistic experience of a complex and interconnected university
- create greater overlap between students' academic and co-curricular lives
- offer clear ways for staff to participate in the exciting work that is being done in academic units
- provide clear ways faculty can connect to students' experiences outside the classroom, and even outside their disciplinary expertise; and,
- foster collaboration and communication across academic, student affairs, and administrative units that support the student experience outside the classroom.

In addition, we are increasing our **international focus** with the goal of providing our students with a variety of opportunities for study, research, and internships abroad, as well as an educational experience here at the University of Vermont that is rich in global perspectives. As one example, over the last year plans have unfolded for our new UVM GO program that launches this

August. UVM GO focuses on global learning, developing intercultural knowledge and skills, and building community. We have designed pre-orientation experiences that allow students to develop their awareness of global issues and make connections in their community and beyond. It's the perfect opportunity for our newest students to connect with UVM faculty, staff, alumni, and local experts—all while having fun and making new friends. Each UVM GO experience is led by a UVM faculty member who will foster student learning on one of several venues whether it be in Vancouver to study social justice in the city, Montreal to experience building cultures across Quebec and Vermont, to examining food systems in Seattle, climate change and youth activism in Washington DC or building communities and commerce in Chicago. We are also offering local but global experiences in our 9 residential learning communities prior to new student orientation.

We are also working to better coordinate and support the **innovation and entrepreneurship** efforts across campus and provide more opportunities for our students to engage in these exciting areas. We are sponsoring a new summit that brings together **research, innovation, sustainability, and entrepreneurship** to spur change for a better tomorrow, and to serve as a model for university-community business engagement across the country. Current students, prospective students, community and business leaders, industry experts, and community members are invited to attend the event next month. The summit will include practical elements of entrepreneurialism including pitch competitions and opportunities to meet with investors.

We have also identified an inventory of our existing I&E resources (physical, programmatic, and expertise) revealing several maker spaces, existing courses and student programs, clubs and pitch contests, faculty expertise, faculty commercialization resources, faculty incubator programs, and technical expertise such as grant writing and IP facilitation. To jump start our I&E efforts and make our physical resources more visible and accessible, we are planning to bring UVM’s “maker” facilities under a single organizational structure, and potentially expanding this space to include additional, supervised student projects.

We have established a **Catamount Core Curriculum that launches this fall of 2023**. All undergraduate degree students are required to complete the Catamount Core Curriculum—designed to expose students to the intellectual breadth of the liberal arts, develop the skills needed to integrate and apply diverse areas of knowledge, and build the foundations for lifelong learning and active participation in local and global communities. The curriculum is made up of 42 credits in courses distributed across three main areas: **LIBERAL ARTS** in the arts and humanities, the social and natural sciences and mathematics (21 credits); **CORE SKILLS** in quantitative and data literacy and writing & information literacy (9 credits); and **COMMON GROUND VALUES** including diversity, sustainability, and global citizenship (12 credits).

In Spring 2022, the university also administered a comprehensive campus climate survey. More than 70% of our faculty, staff and students reported a sense of inclusivity on campus, but we could do better. Our academic and administrative units across the university have used the 2022 data to baseline their DEI efforts and identify where things need to change. This past academic year we initiated a data-driven Inclusive Excellence action planning process. These action plans will guide each units' DEI activities for the next five years. Unit plans have been submitted and received feedback from our Office of the Vice Provost for DEI. This has been an important exercise that will allow us to advance the University's inclusive excellence goals. Our work has just begun as we operationalize our actions to drive change.

Every August, I reflect on **what it means to be a professor** and the value a professor brings to knowledge creation. We are responsible for sharing our knowledge with the world and it starts with the critical connections we make with students in the classroom. Our intellect, our consideration of students' lived experiences and identities, and our ability to challenge them to think, make sense of what they are learning and innovate are powerful tools.

We expect our faculty to challenge our students, engage them, and not take lightly the honored position they hold in helping to develop the minds of our next generation of leaders. We expect our administrative leaders to model and empower best practices in the delivery of inclusive pedagogy in the context of a rigorous curriculum; the creation of impactful research, scholarship and creative arts; and the value of service to their academic and professional

community. We also want our leaders to be problem solvers and innovators who know how to create, navigate, and assess change.

We believe both our faculty and our administrative leaders help shape our student's thinking and their university experience. We ask them to exercise this responsibility with great care. We want faculty to help our students find the focus and passion that will serve as the foundation for productive and fulfilling lives. As John Dewey would encourage us, we ask our faculty to bring a 'new audacity of imagination' to their interactions with our students.

At UVM, our ultimate goal is to enhance the student experience while maintaining the engaged, community-oriented campus environment that uniquely characterizes our institution. Global engagement and cross-cultural understanding, alongside entrepreneurship and innovation, are being woven into all aspects of the UVM experience. Our unwavering commitment to student success is reflected in our commitment to accessibility and affordability. For five years, tuition has been frozen at the same amount, and lower-income Vermonters pay zero tuition.

We are defining today's updated land-grant mission by claiming our unique position between large public flagships and high-ranking, mid-sized private universities. We will ensure our students continue to thrive in a comprehensive research institution with immersive and individualized academic experiences, unmatched campus engagement and support, personalized career planning, and a roadmap to global citizenship.

Thus, the University of Vermont is poised and ready to build upon our reputation as a research institution focused on sustainable solutions with local, national, and global applications and impact. Our distinctive strengths align with the most pressing needs of our time: the health of our societies and the health of our environment. We are pursuing these interconnected issues through the cross-disciplinary research and collaboration that comes more easily at a public research university of our size and scale. Our setting in the state of Vermont enables us to be nimble while providing opportunities to engage in a depth of analysis that contemporary challenges demand.

Having the opportunity to engage with our colleagues from the University of Aberdeen over the next three days can only advance our thinking for creating and interfacing with leaders across the globe. We share your interest in teaching and learning, knowledge creation and engagement at a global level and look forward to ongoing leadership discussions.