Faculty Senate Input: Vision for UVM’s 27th President

Faculty Senators submitted the following input for the Presidential Search Committee on the qualities and attributes of the next President of the University of Vermont. Responses were supplied by 11 members of the Senate, six from the College of Arts and Sciences, two from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and one each from the Grossman School of Business, the College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences, and the College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

Responses to each question are summarized and are followed by specific comments of survey respondents.

1. What opportunities do you see facing the University of Vermont in the next ten years?

Respondents emphasized the quality of the students, the faculty, and our curricular offerings, particularly our interdisciplinary initiatives such as Food Systems, Complex Systems, and the Environmental Institute. They spoke also of the critical contribution of the UVM Foundation and the success of the Move Mountains campaign. Also noted was the vision and strategy on the part of our senior leaders that has let us (UVM) so far to avoid the enrollment downturn that our sister institutions of higher education have experienced.

Specific comments:

- Interdisciplinary programs, vibrant research scholars, engaged students
- Cross-disciplinary initiatives such as Food Systems, Complex Systems, and the Environmental Institute
- The UVM Foundation and the success of the Move Mountains campaign
- Leadership vision and strategy that has let us so far avoid the enrollment downturn that our sister institutions in Vermont have experienced

2. What challenges do you see facing the University of Vermont in the next ten years?

Several themes recurred among respondent comments. Prominent among them were:

1) Demographic shifts in the northeastern U.S. that have resulted in a smaller population of young people of traditional college age in our catchment area and the resultant need to seek other sources of high quality, academically prepared students.
2) The challenge of maintaining vibrant programs in the liberal arts in a climate in which many students and parents are seeking programs that will prepare them for specific careers and professions. “... we need a president who will support and promote the liberal arts.”

3) The rising cost of college tuition and its potential negative effect on enrollment.

4) The relatively small proportion of Vermonters among UVM undergraduates. “This challenge could be linked to the difficulties our state is having keeping a younger workforce in Vermont.”

Specific comments:

- How will UVM prepare for the wave of cheaper high quality online education that is sweeping the higher education arena?
- How will UVM address the rising tuition costs, which might have a negative effect on enrollment?
- Major challenges include ensuring a strong and vibrant College of Arts and Sciences, both in the face of IBB and wavering public opinion, and we need a president who will support and promote the liberal arts. Additional challenges relate to STEM facilities, in CAS and I assume more broadly, and involve funding staff positions who support STEM teaching and research. Current models where laboratory facilities are expected to pay rent and technician salaries and fringe via income-expense accounts are not viable across the board. Investing in support/technical staff needs to be a priority for a viable teacher-scholar model.
- The single greatest challenge facing UVM over the next 10 years will be attracting a sufficient number of qualified students to stay financially and academically viable in a state and region where demographic and cost factors are aligned against the institution. The next president must be able to work with local and distant institutions to forge alliances to flow quality students to UVM.
- My concern is the extremely low percentage of Vermont students in each new cohort of incoming undergraduate students. Parents who know I work at UVM want to know why this statistic is so low and why their children are not getting in. The perception is linked to amount of tuition received (instate versus out of state). I briefly looked online at the following statistics: USA Today: Vermont ranks 3rd in the nation for quality of education; US News and World Report, Vermont ranks 8th; 247 WallSt.com; Vermont ranks 3rd with the quote, “Vermont is one of several New England sites to have one of the highest rated education systems in the country”. I have trouble understanding the disparity of how high the state ranks in education with the limited number of Vermonters that get in. This challenge could be linked to the difficulties our state is having keeping a younger workforce in VT.
- According to a recent NPR broadcast, 74% of college students are non-traditional (meaning not enrolled full time in a 2- or 4-year degree program). How does UVM plan to address this change in the interested student population so that we are a place accessible and appealing to both traditional and non-traditional learners?
• Significant challenges face the College of Arts and Sciences, as demographic forces (New England population stagnation/decline) and a shift in educational choices (away from Liberal Arts to ready-for-workforce schools/majors) threaten UVM’s traditional strength in Arts and Sciences. How will we deal with this challenge?
• I think our biggest challenge will be funding and therefore, we need someone who can hit the fundraising thing out of the park. We need to keep our commitment to liberal arts—in my view the heart of a general education. We need someone who has a ton of proven experience in these two categories of concern. We need someone who will be vetted PRIOR TO HIRING by the department in which his or her golden parachute will land him or her when he or she steps down as president. I feel strongly about that.
• Demographic shifts in the region, loss of potential students, decline in the appeal of the liberal arts and humanities, rising tuition
• Declining population of young people in the northeast in general and VT in particular
• Necessity of fostering an inclusive community in which diversity is respected and in which all members feel safe and at ease
• Need to support liberal arts so that the programs remain viable even in the face of declining enrollment in those programs
• Low proportion of VT high-school grads that go on to pursue a 4-year degree (This may also be regarded as an opportunity)
• Financial challenges, independent of changing demographics
• Emphasis on graduate education is secondary

3. What professional qualifications/experiences should the next president possess?

Faculty senators emphasized that the next president of the University of Vermont should be a product of the academy, with an outstanding record of success in scholarship and teaching as well as leadership experience at a high level. The next president should also have demonstrated success as a fundraiser. Ideally he or she would have served at a state university and would respect and support UVM’s land grant mission.

Specific comments:

• I think the next president should have a proven track record of commitment to several of the following areas highlighted in UVM’s Vision Statement: liberal education, environment, health, and public service. We have invested many decades in developing excellence and expertise in these areas, and the next president should be someone who plans to strengthen our core areas rather than changing direction or responding to temporary shifts in the winds of higher education.
• I would urge the committee to select only candidates who have either student or professional experience of depth in a public, state university. The president needs to fully comprehend what a state university is. Moreover, the president must be someone who has not had a single focus from undergraduate through graduate degrees and then professional academic work and administrative experience in only one area of the university. We need a person is a full understanding of the complete structure, the rich
potentials, and the various ways of thinking – often contradictory thinking – that happens within the many diverse communities that make up a public, state university.

- Strong and established record of scholarship and teaching, demonstrated evidence of fundraising and/or community relations
- He or she should have risen through the ranks of the professoriate, so that s/he values the primacy of the faculty in the success of the university. We do not want a CEO who views the university as a corporate entity.
- Obviously a distinguished record of success in high level leadership at a previous institution
- Accessibility of the President to his/her constituents

4. What personal leadership characteristics should the next president possess?

Senators responding to this survey emphasized that the next president of the University must be a good and forthright communicator, be it with faculty, students, staff, legislators, or prospective donors. He or she must also evidence genuine respect for the shared governance model and for all partners in the shared governance of the University.

Specific comments:

- Speak clearly and forthrightly, even if it’s bad news being communicated
- Genuine respect for the shared governance model and partners in same
- Excellent communicator
- Ability to relate well to prospective donors
- Understanding of and commitment to UVM’s land grant mission
- Advocate for UVM at the legislature

5. What other considerations should the Presidential Search Committee bear in mind as we initiate the process?

Specific comments:

- I would like to see a woman or someone from an under-represented group be selected for this position. It is long overdue.
- With respect to financial matters, UVM is more similar to a private university than a public university
- Please help us to find another leader as remarkable as Tom Sullivan!

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine A. Paris,
President of the UVM Faculty Senate
3 October 2018