

## STANDARD I: MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

### Description

In 1791, the legislature and governor of the new State of Vermont enacted a charter for The University of Vermont, establishing it in a manner similar to other state-chartered institutions in New England such as Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth. In the decades following, the legislature and governor amended the charter from time to time. In 1864, they enacted a charter for the State Agricultural College, consistent with the federal Land Grant Act introduced by Vermont's Justin Morrill and passed by the Congress and President of the United States in 1861. In 1865, additional legislation led to creation of a charter for the merger of the two institutions into a single entity legally designated The University of Vermont and State Agricultural College. Since that time, the legislative and executive branches of state government have further amended the charter on several occasions. The most significant such amendment was made in 1955 when, at the request of the University itself, the General Assembly and Governor designated The University of Vermont and State Agricultural College an "instrumentality of the State," whereby the State committed itself not only to the support of agricultural programs, medical education, and the training of teachers, but also to the full range of educational programs at UVM. In turn, the University committed to provide admissions preference for Vermont residents, set a lower tuition rate for Vermont residents, and in other ways serve as the state university for Vermont. While the mission and objectives of The University of Vermont and State Agricultural College have changed from time to time, just as the charter has changed, they have nonetheless evolved in ways consistent with the charter and consonant with the principles upon which the institution was founded.

Throughout the decade since our last self-study, The University of Vermont and State Agricultural College has operated under the mission statement adopted by the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees at the time of that 1988 self study, except for the addition of a single word added to copies of the statement published since 1990-91<sup>1</sup>. The text of the 1988 mission statement currently reads:

*The University of Vermont and State Agricultural College blends the academic heritage of a private university with service missions in the land-grant tradition. Vermont's only university-level institution of higher education directs its resources toward the provision of excellence in instruction, innovation in research and scholarship, and public service to the citizens of the state, nation, and world. As befits a small but comprehensive university, the curricula in UVM's undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs integrate the principles of liberal education to enhance the personal, professional, and intellectual growth of its students. Through a widespread spirit of inquiry and investigative rigor, UVM's faculty, staff, and students participate in extending humankind's knowledge of self and environment. In its special partnership with the citizens of Vermont, The*

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<sup>1</sup>The single word is "staff."

*University of Vermont contributes analysis and definition to the human, social, technological, managerial, cultural, environmental, and educational issues of the State.*

Consistent with the mission statement, our 1988 self-study report proposed a number of goals and objectives that have provided a basic framework during the past decade. The central themes included commitments to liberal education, cultural diversity, professional educational opportunities, research and scholarship, life-long learning, patient care in the health sciences, graduate education, and service to local, state, and federal governments, community organizations, business enterprises, and other public needs.

This mission statement has appeared annually in the published catalogue of UVM, and can be found at UVM's website [<http://www.uvm.edu/aboutuvm/Mission.html>].

The Fifth-Year Interim Report that UVM filed with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges on September 15, 1993 reported:

During the 1992 strategic planning process, the University's mission was brought to life in a statement describing a vision of The University of Vermont five years from now. . . . The University-wide planning group, the President's Commission on Critical Choices, identified three dominant institutional priorities for the future: 1) a high quality education for all university students; 2) excellent and diverse faculty, students, and staff; and 3) a new understanding with the State of Vermont.

This 1992 Report by the UVM President's Commission on Critical Choices, subtitled "A Framework for Change," may be accessed through UVM's accreditation website [<http://www.uvm.edu/%7eprovoost/accreditation/PCCC.html>].

### **Appraisal and Projection**

In the spring and summer of 1997, the early part of this self-study involved focus groups of faculty, staff, and students in developing vision statements and a mission statement. The inauguration of a new President in October 1997 added to the vision of UVM and launched a renewed examination of the University's mission. The latter part of the self-study process through 1998 has focused on several areas of emphasis for the future of The University of Vermont, and a revised statement of mission has emerged from that effort. The new Statement of Mission and Purposes, which will guide the University during the coming decade, is set forth at the beginning of the part of this document that addresses our Areas of Emphasis.

What clearly joins our newly-generated mission statement with its predecessor, and in turn with evolution of the charter, is a union of elements often considered disparate if not paradoxical: the heritage of a private university coupled with the service traditions of a land-grant university. And when the dynamic tension involved in balancing, accommodating, and honoring these elements is overlaid with the inevitable financial fragility of being partially

dependent on state funding in a sparsely populated state — UVM perennially ranks 50<sup>th</sup> among state universities in terms of state financial support — one can begin to understand the enormity of the challenge facing the institution.

The fact that UVM has by and large managed to satisfy constituencies seeking both the academic heritage of a private liberal arts university and the service traditions of a land-grant institution is a function of our history as well as a testament to the extraordinary efforts of members of the UVM community. Historically, early UVM presidents came out of the Congregationalist tradition, a tradition liberal in nature that strongly focused on good works and the exercise of belief in action. It was this tradition that resonated well with the culture of Vermont settlers and later inhabitants whose focus, while not unmindful of the next world, was squarely in and of this world. It was, moreover, a tradition that can be traced from our earliest days, to alumnus John Dewey (UVM class of 1879), to 1998 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Jody Williams (UVM class of 1972).

This institutional predilection for engagement in the world has been reflected in a historically continuous community of students, faculty, and staff who also engage in the world to a degree perhaps uncommon among university community members. In part, this is a value of Vermont itself — the only state where Town Meeting Day is not only an official holiday but a still vital social, political, and cultural event. In part, too, engagement reflects our institution's physical setting, in which mountains, lakes, a myriad of small farms, relatively few people and cars, and the omnipresence of the natural world attracts individuals who tend to engage with the environment recreationally, professionally, and spiritually.

In these senses, the traditional academic elements of the mission not only co-exist with the service and land-grant elements, they are essentially part of the same continuum. And our strength to date has been the ability to educate and graduate individuals with an appreciation for not just one aspect of our mission, but for the mission's wholeness.

