

UVM's Relationship to Vermont and the World

Members of the University of Vermont community contribute to and benefit from the local, state, national, and global communities in a myriad of ways. This proud yet often unrecognized and unacknowledged tradition of community service can be traced back to the institution's earliest days and to the strongly service-oriented philosophy of its founders and the generations of students, faculty, and administrators who have preceded us. Today, UVM's students, faculty, and staff contribute over 100,000 hours of service each year through University-based, community-based, national, and international organizations. Although some facts about this exemplary record are reasonably well known, much of this service is done in a quiet and even self-effacing manner, in keeping with the Vermont character that shuns self-aggrandizement and promotion and believes that good works are their own reward. It is also important to note that the UVM concept of service goes far beyond volunteerism alone in encompassing the principled engagement with communities near and far that is central to our land grant mission.

Locally, our multiple relationships with the greater Burlington community are mixed in character. It is generally recognized — although not always valued — that the University is a powerful engine driving much of Burlington's, Chittenden County's, and Vermont's economic activity. UVM faculty, staff, and students provide important ongoing support in schools, social services, and healthcare. The University is responsible for a large number of musical, artistic, and theatrical performances, lectures, other cultural, and athletic events that greatly enrich the community and support Burlington's reputation as a "most livable" city. As is not uncommon in smaller metropolitan areas with a significant higher education presence, however, town-gown relationships are often strained. And although gradually improving, prominent issues remain: the most significant being student-driven pressure on the rental housing market, and the coexistence of student and family lifestyles in residential neighborhoods. In the past year, notable progress has been made in forming the partnerships and relationships required to address these concerns. For example, UVM President Judith Ramaley and Burlington Mayor Peter Clavelle have co-chaired public fora and jointly vowed to work toward mutually acceptable solutions. The University is a regular and well-regarded presence at neighborhood and community meetings and has developed a partnership relationship with the Burlington Police focused on prevention and proactive community policing. Faculty and staff serve pro bono on major non-profit boards and committees dedicated to improving the quality of life locally and regionally. And members of the UVM community are highly politically involved — involvement that ranges from serving in the Vermont Senate and House to school boards and political interest groups.

With the State of Vermont, the University's relationship is both interesting and unusual. On one hand, we are regarded as an indispensable resource in providing educational, medical, environmental, agricultural, and economic services to the state. On the other hand — and although designated as the state university — the amount of state funding we receive is remarkably low, resulting in Vermont's national rank as last in per capita support of higher

education. This has profound consequences for the financial status of the university and its affordability to Vermont residents.

At the national and international levels, UVM is a strong contributor. New knowledge resulting from our research and scholarship has had important impact in a wide range of fields, particularly biomedicine, environmental science, engineering, and policy. Our faculty take leadership roles in learned societies, peer-review groups, and are in demand for presentations at national and international meetings. Our alumni are extraordinarily involved in national and international activity, as well, although few have made as dramatic contributions as Nobel Peace Prize recipient Jody Williams, UVM class of 1972.

Starting from a Sense of Place

A distinctive strength of UVM is that it is inextricably tied to a particular place, Vermont, and yet, through its intellectual connections and relationships draws on ideas and inspiration from virtually everywhere in the world. Those ideas and inspiration are then filtered through a Vermont sensibility — which we articulate as being concerned more with quality than quantity, more with human scale than mass scale, more with partnerships and active constituent involvement than with “command and control” relationships, more with resource sustainability and stewardship than short-term, resource-draining activities, more with an individual’s learned ability to recognize the good and the worthwhile than with media- or other-driven definitions of the good. The contribution that we then bring to partnerships with the community is our experience in equitably working with individuals to define issues of importance to them, based on their own experiences and concerns, turning these experiences and questions into researchable issues that lead to implementation and actions, and partnering with these individuals in the execution that then makes a difference in the community.

We firmly believe that the most valuable contribution UVM makes to the State of Vermont emerges from our academic life and instructional programs, in particular the close personal interactions among our faculty, students, and community members. Many examples exist of long-standing and effective University-community collaboration cutting across all of UVM's schools and colleges. These relationships are guided by a culture of inquiry and a culture of caring. Community partnerships with UVM faculty, staff, and students have had a major positive impact in strengthening Vermont rural communities through seed grants, leadership development, agricultural innovation, school development institutes, and business management. These concepts have spread to other regions of rural America; examples include Environmental Partnerships in Communities (EPIC), Professional Development Schools, the Women's Agricultural Network, and the Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The Center for Research on Vermont is also an important focal point for these efforts.

Regionally, nationally, and increasingly internationally, UVM is acknowledged as a major contributor in the area of health. The College of Medicine, School of Nursing, and School of Allied Health are directly responsible for training a sizeable percentage of Vermont’s health care practitioners and for direct delivery of high quality and, where appropriate, high

technology health care to the people of Vermont and northern New York. Particular strengths reside in the areas of cardiovascular disease, cancer control and prevention, and basic biomedical research. These programs and many others have positive impacts on health maintenance and disease treatment, and these impacts reach far beyond the local level. Such expertise is extended to support the delivery of rural health care through technological advances such as telemedicine, as well as direct involvement in patient care and the education of local providers.

The University of Vermont has a long history of working to understand and preserve the Vermont environment, the rural landscape, and Lake Champlain. UVM personnel are valuable resources for local, state, and private organizations, as well as for individuals, and frequently take leadership roles in regional environmental matters and historic preservation. Environmental research at the University increases the understanding of our environment and provides new strategies for prevention and remediation of environmental damage. Given that the Vermont environment and economy are inextricably linked to agriculture, UVM's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and its Extension Service continuously work with the citizens of Vermont as a center of education, service, outreach, and research to create a healthy and sustainable rural environment in which agriculture can continue to be a major component of the Vermont economy.

The sense of place is a metaphor not exclusively bucolic: As the state's third largest employer, the University provides over 3000 jobs to Vermonters and brings over \$220,000,000 into Vermont each year. Much of the economic activity within Chittenden County, including major employers (IBM, Fletcher Allen Health Care, IDX), the local service industry, and a series of startup companies, including Ben & Jerry's, have current and historic ties to UVM. New businesses are spawned through technology transfer, small businesses are enriched through practical, research-based support, and workforce education is provided to partners in Vermont industry.

Finally, we are extremely proud of the exceptionally strong record of service accumulated by UVM faculty, students, and staff. Examples of outstanding contributions include service in local schools, hospitals, service agencies, and the underprivileged community. We also have an exceptional record in international service, including strong contributions to the Peace Corps and sister city projects.

International Involvement

UVM has a longstanding interest in and commitment to diverse forms of international educational activities. At the heart of these endeavors are research and scholarship that explore matters of international significance. This work involves faculty, students, and staff working across national boundaries exploring and expanding upon the current state of knowledge.

Approximately 18 percent of UVM's third-year class, or nearly 400 UVM students per year, take advantage of a study abroad experience. UVM students choose to study all over the world — in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Australia, and New Zealand. Most recently, exchange programs are being developed with universities in South Africa. In addition, many disciplines offer field experiences in international settings, where students work with faculty in research and service projects in communities across the world.

On campus, there are approximately 200 international students each year, representing over forty countries. In addition, UVM annually hosts nearly 130 visiting researchers and professors and their families. These scholars mainly come from the People's Republic of China, Canada, Japan, Russia, and the United Kingdom; most are researchers working with the departments of Microbiology, Engineering, Biochemistry, Pharmacology, Animal Sciences, and Public Administration.

Most colleges and schools have organized activities addressing international issues, notably the Area and International Studies Programs in the College of Arts and Sciences and the International Development Program in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. For details, please refer to the response to Standard Four on Programs and Instruction. Many faculty engaged in these programs also conduct research and service in partnership with governments, educational institutions, and agencies in countries such as Belize, Costa Rica, and the People's Republic of China.

Concerns with Relationships beyond the Campus

Comments in the Fall 1998 Roundtable discussion suggested that in its relationship with some segments of the community, the University is seen as being less than the sum of its parts. There appears to be a widespread perception that relationships between the community and many individual faculty, staff, and students are outstanding and that these individuals are a tremendous asset to the local and state community. In contrast, the institution is sometimes perceived in a very different light, as a liability, or at best a non-participant, in relationships with the external community.

Clearly, the relationship between UVM and the State of Vermont is complicated by financial pressures. Support for higher education in general and the University of Vermont in particular has historically been weak, both on an absolute scale, and relative to the flagship universities of other states. As a result, UVM is highly dependent on tuition income and is under economic pressure to maintain high in-state and out-of-state tuition levels, as well as a corresponding high proportion of out-of-state students. There is also broad concern that UVM is not adequately affordable to low- and middle-income Vermonters, and that economic pressures result in a student body that lacks a desirable element of economic diversity. In addition, our high tuition makes private colleges and out-of-state public institutions relatively more attractive to the most highly talented Vermont high school graduates.

Locally, the presence of approximately half of UVM's students in rental housing has contributed to both economic and social pressures that are experienced by families and full-time residents cohabiting Burlington's neighborhoods. The "party school" image of UVM is, in part, deserved and is reflected in unhealthy student behavior and in less than cordial relationships between some year-round residents and some students. As suggested above, the University and city have recently made significant progress in addressing these issues, but much work still needs to be done. The presence of students who persist in choosing "partying" over academics is an obvious immediate detriment to the University and the community, but also has serious long-term implications insofar as it decreases the quality of our student body and graduates, and negatively impacts our ability to attract and retain dedicated faculty.

Despite the high level of community involvement by many members of the University community, UVM is more than occasionally perceived as being isolated and uninvolved. The University has generally failed in consistently and effectively communicating who we are, what we do, and why our work is important. There is a need to identify, publicize, and celebrate our successes, while still acknowledging our deficiencies and communicating how we are attempting to address them. The hybrid public/private nature of the institution represents an additional challenge in generating understanding and support among constituencies including legislators, the public, and our alumni. Cited as being particularly lacking is our ability to successfully communicate the institution's activities and successes in research and scholarship.

In a global context, there is concern that members of the UVM community have an inadequate understanding of cultures, societies, and peoples who are not members of the white, middle-class, English-speaking society from which the overwhelming majority of our students, faculty, and staff are drawn. In addition, our lackluster record in building a multiracial and international community of scholars raises serious questions as to how well we are preparing our students for full participation in the global society and economy.

Opportunities for Exploration and Action

1. Develop a culture of communication and collaboration.

We need to develop more effective modes of communication and collaboration within the University, and between the University and the outside world. There is no doubt that the future success of our graduates will depend on their ability to work in groups that include people with diverse talents and experiences. The administration, faculty, and staff of UVM need to become examples of outstanding collaboration and communication. Modeling such behavior will be a much more effective means of training our students than preaching collaboration while practicing something else.

2. Support a culture of productive engagement with the community and world.

The distinctive role of UVM is to set the stage for creative solutions to societal problems and to prepare ourselves, our students, and our community partners to adapt to a rapidly changing world and address problems that may not have been previously encountered. Engagement, as we define and practice it, is a way to prepare for a future that will be very different from the world we know today. Productive engagement through sustained partnerships empowers participants to generate and apply new knowledge and support the capacity to take meaningful risks — resulting ideally in an environment of "pervasive caring" in which "deep learning" can occur. If the institution can move toward becoming an even more inclusive, empowering, and engaging community, it can correspondingly better support enhancing the quality of life in Vermont. We therefore believe UVM must place engagement at the heart of our mission and give some attention to recognizing, recording, and assessing our own community-based work. As we achieve this goal, we may also be able to counter the perception of UVM as a series of "boxes" formed by boundaries between departments and colleges that are often difficult to cross. One critical challenge in this arena is determining how to see beyond these "boxes" in order to respond to the complex problems that present themselves at the community level.

3. Expect, reward, and celebrate engagement and excellence.

Can we learn to recognize, celebrate and support quality features of the University? To respond effectively to complex community issues, we must both support the work of the people who are already active in the community but who are largely unrecognized and perhaps discouraged, as well as encourage additional participation by investing in campus support for engagement and offering explicit rewards for successful community involvement. Institutionally, we must find ways to build on the longstanding relationships and partnerships that exist among local communities and some sectors of the campus work. While the desire to be of service thankfully runs deeply and broadly at UVM, and the commitment most often derives from the inherent generosity of faculty, staff, and students, more often than not it is viewed as something we do *in addition to* our primary responsibilities rather than as an integral function of our mission and that mission's intersection with personal belief. Remediating this situation means studying our own explicit and implicit reward system and providing intentional support for those who engage in outreach and community service and work in alliances and partnership modes. This includes attention to the standards we use to evaluate faculty contributions during reviews for promotion and tenure or merit salary adjustments.

4. Strengthen partnerships with the Greater Burlington community.

Our role in a partnership with the local community is to draw upon expertise that is an outgrowth of our academic strengths in order to contribute to a University-community

relationship characterized by shared goals and mutually agreeable definitions of success, and funded by shared resources. The resulting relationship is of mutual benefit and is likely to promote learning for all parties while building their capacity and competency. This kind of partnership is hardly a new idea. Faculty and students have been creating and working within such collaborations for many years, even when such activities were not viewed as central to the mission of the University. For full engagement, faculty, staff and students must all be involved. Many of our students already accept the concept of community involvement and civic responsibility as a natural component of the student experience. These experiences obviously can and do shape a lifelong commitment to service. And when this propensity is meaningfully connected to student educational goals and research experiences, the result is a powerful experience for the student and a compelling point of differentiation for the institution. Community service offers opportunities for the natural questions that arise in a democracy to be experienced in the "teachable moment" that a living laboratory can offer. Engagement is often messy, difficult, and time-consuming while requiring a real commitment and persistence. For those who persevere, the outcomes can be extraordinarily valuable.

5. Enhance our connections with the State of Vermont.

First and foremost, we should recognize and adhere to the principle that the most important service the University provides to the people of Vermont is the education of students to maximize their future social, cultural, intellectual, and economic contributions to the state. This principle applies both to Vermont students and also to out-of-state students who choose to remain in Vermont for employment or postgraduate educational purposes. We must therefore enhance the visibility of UVM in the state by talking about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and what difference it makes. We need a clear profile of the connections we have made, what we are doing throughout the state, and what impact this work is having in communities in Vermont. A major challenge for UVM is to identify ways to relate to Vermonters and to reduce class and cultural barriers that limit access and opportunity for many citizens of this state. People want a way to connect to a collective effort that can enhance their ability to be of service and to work with others who share common aspirations and goals for their communities. The result is the generation of a shared sense of purpose, values, and power. The strategies being adopted by a number of state agencies, including the Departments of Economic Development, Education, Agriculture and Human Services, and non-governmental organizations such as United Way, provide exciting avenues for faculty, staff, and student research and service. Two common elements emerging in all these strategies are (1) an emphasis on a research base to support the design of effective strategies to enhance the quality of life of Vermonters and (2) a common theme of community-building and sustainable communities.

6. Extend our relationships with the world at large.

Education, research, diversity, and service represent the key components of the relationship between the university and the world. Our educational activities represent a service to the world in a similar way in which they contribute to the state and local communities. Research at UVM will continue to make key advances in support of increasing our basic knowledge of the world around us, with particular emphases and applications in the broad areas of health and the environment. Improvements in social, cultural, economic, and racial diversity on campus will better prepare our students, faculty, and staff for constructive, meaningful, and satisfying participation in the worldwide community. Service that expands well beyond the borders of the state of Vermont must be supported and celebrated in such a way that our current successes in these areas are maintained and expanded.