

## **UVM and Its Faculty and Staff**

The University of Vermont has the great fortune to be the professional home of a highly talented and dedicated group of faculty and staff. Our faculty are first of all scholars and educators. The heart of their mission is the generation and transmission of knowledge that will promote understanding and enhance the quality of life of our students and external constituents. Our staff members are directly engaged in essential functions and supportive services associated with learning, scholarship, and maintenance of a vital academic environment. The core values of the university community are eloquently described in the statement "Our Common Ground," adopted by the Board of Trustees in 1998 with the broad endorsement of UVM's faculty, staff, and student community. Our mission is articulated in the 1998 Mission Statement.

With regard to faculty, several significant changes are notable. A substantial wave of faculty retirements has begun, and is expected to continue over the next 10-15 years as those faculty who were hired during a period of University expansion approach retirement age. In general, new faculty recruits have been of very high quality, although there are signs that the University's relatively weak financial status is increasingly becoming an issue in faculty recruiting and retention. Some changes in the policies and procedures affecting faculty, as expressed in the UVM Officers' Handbook, have been put in place during the past decade, but these have been in the nature of refinements and clarifications rather than dramatic changes.

The staff classification system has remained largely unchanged since its inception in 1983 and is in need of major revision. The Changing Workplace Task Force conducted a year-long review and evaluation of the current system, with extensive work on campus and an examination of the best practices of other institutions. The task force has very recently presented a report containing its recommendations to President Ramaley, and major recommendations are indicated below.

Faculty and staff compensation remains a significant issue. Although there has been some debate concerning the identification of relevant comparison universities, there is general agreement that in most areas, staff and faculty salaries fall substantially below where they should. The benefits package is regarded as quite strong, although there is campus-wide concern that this strength may not be sustainable in the future as the cost of health care continues to escalate. Campus leadership is working diligently on mechanisms through which salary and benefits packages can be optimized within a sustainable institutional budget and while clearly reflecting institutional philosophy, goals, and principles.

### **Strengths**

UVM's faculty is comprised of outstanding scholars and teachers, whose work continues to be of great value to our students, our academic community, and the Vermont, national, and global communities. Members of the staff are outstanding contributors to the University's mission. Over the past decade, many members of the faculty and staff have accepted

increasing responsibilities, and have made creative and positive contributions to our students, our campus community, and our external constituencies. In many cases, these contributions have been made under difficult circumstances, including greater workloads, budget cuts, and very modest salary increases. The work of these dedicated individuals lies at the heart of UVM's continuing success as an institution of higher learning.

The people of UVM are already starting to work together in ways that were not at all common just a few years ago. Examples include the emergence of self-directed teams, quality initiatives, and other University-wide efforts to enhance our abilities as a learning organization. Staff development and training opportunities are improved, and there is the impression that, in general, supervisors are much more supportive of staff development activities. "Mastering the Maze" is one excellent example of a campus-wide effort to help people function effectively within our highly complex organization.

Two very important statements of purpose, values, and goals have been drafted, revised, and strongly endorsed by the campus and Board of Trustees. The University Mission Statement is a foundation document that describes our aspirations and guides our activities. The statement "Our Common Ground" serves as a central guiding influence that frames the interrelationships among the many diverse individuals within our campus community.

Policies and practices for hiring, evaluation, and promotion for faculty and staff are generally quite effective, although opportunities for streamlining and modernization certainly exist.

### **Concerns**

Many of the concerns expressed by faculty and staff have their root in the fragile financial structure of the university. Frustrations relating to compensation, workload, and the level of student preparation can be viewed as a direct or indirect consequence of financial resources too thinly spread. Staff and faculty are required to do more and better with less time, less financial support, and fewer people. Concern exists regarding the University's ability to provide a competitive compensation package for faculty and staff. These demands compete with one another and reduce the ability of faculty and staff to focus on the parts of their jobs most important to them. A good deal of the dissatisfaction of some faculty and staff with their careers appears to be a consequence of a perception that either (a) there is not enough time to do a good job at the things that really matter (as defined by the individual), and/or (b) that supervisors and colleagues do not understand, appreciate, or share those values.

Although faculty have always sought to support the success of their students, the means of doing this have grown more demanding and require different professional skills: recruitment of students, fund-raising, working with students with learning disorders, promoting multiculturalism, enhancing the first-year experience, designing new forms of advising and mentoring, service- and community-based learning, and generating authentic research experiences for students. Faculty training opportunities have been limited and have not been enthusiastically embraced when offered.

Faculty and staff perceive that a historical lack of leadership from the central administration has led to erosion of a sense of common purpose and mission for the University that extends beyond their local administrative units. A significant number perceive that this is changing for the better with the advent of a new administrative team and the development of a well-supported mission statement.

The limited diversity of our faculty and staff continues to be a widespread concern. Within the community, there are serious questions about whether we could do better in our recruitment and retention efforts, while others feel that we are doing the best job possible, considering the demographic and geographic status of Vermont.

Participation in and enthusiasm for the Faculty Senate and Staff Council is limited among the constituents of both bodies. The possibility of significant restructuring within the faculty senate is currently under serious examination and is expected to be debated during the current academic year.

For much of the past decade, there has been little trust among faculty and staff in University-level planning and decision-making. Faculty members are increasingly reluctant to donate time and energy to committee service, and cite a legacy of committees and task forces that generated recommendations never acted upon. There are signs that this attitude is changing, albeit gradually. Winning the trust of cynical faculty is one of the major challenges facing our senior administration, but progress is being made.

Mechanisms need to be developed that help to keep faculty and staff professionally productive and continuously engaged in the University community, and to encourage the evolution of responsibilities, interests, and skills over the course of a professional career.

### **Opportunities for Exploration and Action**

Faculty and staff have stressed the need for effective planning, so that we can adapt to and gain some control over changes, rather than be controlled by change. Mechanisms need to be found that will encourage faculty and staff to willingly and deliberately accept and manage the risks that are inherent in institutional change, and foster a culture that encourages creativity, experimentation, and collaboration.

Accomplishment of these aims will require a significant shift in the prevailing University culture. Strong efforts need to be undertaken in an attempt to change the culture through reducing the general cynicism, reducing tensions between faculty and staff, and reducing competition between units, while still fostering a sense of campus community. Initial efforts towards achieving these goals are promising. Communications between senior administrative officers and members of the faculty and staff appear to be significantly improved. The President and Provost have succeeded in engaging the community in a discussion of the overall goals of the institution (as evidenced by President Ramaley's discussions with the Faculty Senate during the evolution of the mission statement), and specific areas of emphasis for the evolution of the University (as evidenced by Provost Gamble's identification of and discussions surrounding five areas of emphasis for university activities).

In this regard, a short term priority should be a broad discussion and agreement or modification on the University's priorities, currently articulated as focusing on (1) liberal education, (2) health, (3) environment, (4) technology, and (5) "connectedness." (These priorities are described more fully at the end of the section on Strategic Budgeting.) In the process of these and other discussions, more effective communications within and among all members of the University community need to be fostered. One example of effort in this direction is the first State of the University Address, delivered by President Ramaley in January 1999.

Current efforts to update the staff classification system should be carried to completion. The recommendations of the Changing Workplace Task Force are an excellent step in that direction, and should be implemented with all deliberate speed.

It is important to recognize that achieving our aspirations for building an outstanding institution for learning, research, teaching, and service depends on our ability to attract, support, and retain outstanding members of our faculty and staff. The University and its constituent Colleges and Schools need to develop and implement clearly defined plans for recruitment, retention, and professional development of our faculty and staff. For faculty, clear expectations and high standards for promotion and tenure should be implemented, along with effective mechanisms to support the development of both junior and senior faculty. The possibility of in time introducing flexibility to tenure should also be examined. For staff, clear expectations and performance standards for career advancement should be implemented, along with effective mechanisms to support staff development. The Individual Development Plan (IDP) project, now being piloted in several units, shows promise in this arena.

In addressing our institutional needs, we should keep in mind that we are engaged in the development of a community of scholars in which responsibility is shared, diverse talents and perspectives are recognized and encouraged, and accomplishments are celebrated.