

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: INTEGRATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND DESIRABLE FUTURE



*Photo credit: University of Vermont 2006 Campus Master Plan*

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity faces significant challenges and opportunities to redirect our course toward a sustainable and desirable future. Universities must play a critical role in this transformation, not only by educating future leaders and supporting researchers in the quest for applied solutions, but also by serving as models of innovative practices and sustainable systems. Universities in the U.S. have not yet risen to this challenge and many sustainability initiatives have dissolved into fragmented, tinkering reforms that fail to address the underlying workings of our complex socio-ecological systems. We at the University of Vermont, as members of an institution that is already a nationally recognized leader in integrated, transdisciplinary research, teaching and service, embrace our responsibility to transform our university into a powerful catalyst, model, and engine of positive and lasting change: a driving force that leads society by design to a sustainable and desirable future.

UVM's physical location and size make it easy to be mindful of our natural assets. The university is situated on a hilltop cradled by Vermont's Green Mountains to the east and New York's Adirondack Mountains to the West. It is grounded by the vast basin of Lake Champlain, surrounded by farms and forests, touched by streams and rivers and uniquely impacted by daily and seasonal rhythms. Because of the more intimate — that is, more human — scale of our institution relative to our peer institutions, we are in a wonderful position to implement the bold and transformative ideas outlined here.

The transformative action plan that follows was prepared by the Leading by Design Task Force, a group composed of UVM faculty, staff, administrators, student representatives, and Burlington community members, in close consultation with President Dan Fogel and Provost John Hughes. It was informed by broad participation of the UVM community and supported by a planning grant of \$80,000 awarded by the Lewis Foundation and an additional \$20,000 contributed by the UVM Provost's Office.

We recognize that creating a sustainable and desirable future represents a profound design challenge, as well as an exciting opportunity to collectively describe a vision for the future of UVM, Vermont, the Nation, and the world.

Through a shared envisioning process that included two community events, online surveys, blogs, and email submissions of ideas, more than 1,000 visionaries from around the campus and the surrounding community responded to this design challenge. Faculty, staff, students, administrators, and Burlington community members proposed, reviewed, and critiqued the plan. Research on current best practices both at UVM and at our peer and aspirant institutions provided further direction. Throughout this process of shared visioning and research, several key ideas emerged. First, in addressing the current ecological crisis we face, successful solutions must overcome the disciplinary boundaries and divisions within universities. We are committed to transcending these boundaries and applying transdisciplinary, holistic, systems thinking and integrative solutions to the current crisis.

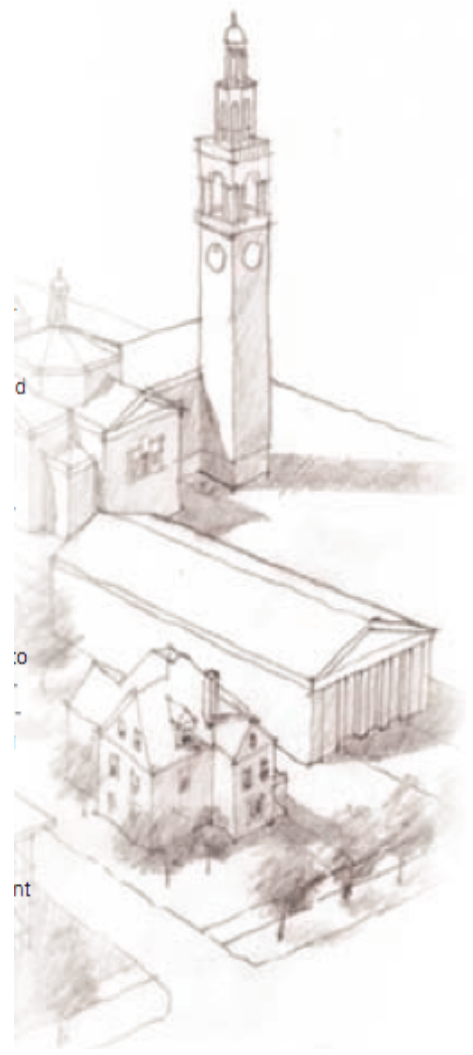
To orchestrate this transformation, we propose the formation of a new pan-university agency for integrative solutions (final name and structure still under consideration). David Orr, in a recent talk at UM pointed out that modern universities have been complicit in not asking the big questions, such as “What is the relationship between education and human survival?” The pan-university agency for integrative solutions would help us to ask and answer the big questions, by seeking solutions that expand our categories of thought, and by allowing students to address the complexity of the world.

While transdisciplinary centers and institutes structured around specific topics exist at UVM and several other universities, a pan-university agency devoted to integrative solutions is a new concept, not found in any other university. Rather than replacing any of the existing university structures, it would add value by providing a transdisciplinary network to foster integration, cooperation, synthesis, whole-systems thinking, connection with the community, and the creation of real solutions. It is important that the pan-university agency function at a scale large enough to achieve its visionary goals.

The pan-university agency will achieve these goals through a coordinated and integrated set of transdisciplinary initiatives, projects, courses, certificates, and research opportunities which promote collaboration between the various schools and colleges within UVM and connect UVM with local, regional, and global communities. By linking the many existing UVM programs that are already working toward transformative education and sustainability with each other and with new programs and initiatives, the pan-university agency will provide a structure for collaboration and integration of research, education, and service. Specifically, that structure will provide:

- Transdisciplinary Initiatives in Campus Sustainability, Planetary Health, Ecological Design, Sustainable Enterprise, Ecovillages, Ecoliteracy, and a new journal entitled Solutions. The goal of these initiatives is to enhance collaboration and cooperation among the various colleges and departments at UVM and the larger world.

- Transformative Projects, developed collaboratively by members of the university community, which will serve as highly visible and tangible transformations of the campus. These projects range from improvements in buildings, physical plant operations, and landscapes to changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and economics.
- Certificates in Sustainable Enterprise, Ecological Economics, Ecological Design, Complex Systems, Community Engagement, EcoHealth, Green Leadership, Collaborative Management, Ecological Arts, and Community Planning. Certificate programs bridge different fields of study and allow students to pursue competencies in areas that may be outside of their home discipline.
- Innovative Courses, both solutions-focused and tools-based, made available to students in all colleges and departments. Solutions-focused (that is, problem-based or service learning) courses bring together faculty, students, and stakeholders to solve real-world problems. Tools-based courses use the increasing power and sophistication of the internet and other emerging technologies to maximum advantage.
- A cadre of faculty, internal and external fellows, graduate students, and post-docs to pursue these initiatives with adequate support and positive, consistent rewards. University-wide faculty appointments, joint-appointments, internal and external fellows and graduate and undergraduate fellowships will provide a flexible structure emphasizing integration and synthesis.



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The University of Vermont prides itself in a shared governance model, and the proposed pan-University agency and its related initiatives are currently under review through this decision making process, which involves the faculty senate, board of trustees, and other governance bodies.

We believe that the initiatives and projects outlined here will transform our university into a catalyst, model, and engine of change, enabling UVM to truly become a driving force leading society by design to a sustainable and desirable future.