



The University of Vermont

Office of the President

March 22, 2011

Daniel Mark Fogel Jane Knodell

From: Daniel Mark Fogel, President
Jane Knodell, Provost

To: Ida Russin, Staff Council President
Michelle Smith, Staff Council Vice President

Re: **Response to Staff Council Memorandum of March 18, 2011**

Thank you for your memorandum expressing a number of concerns on a range of issues. Before attempting to address each one, we would like to state unequivocally: UVM staff are absolutely essential to the success of our University, and each of us (and all of our colleagues in senior administration) deeply appreciate the importance of UVM's staff. If some of the difficult decisions and the communications around them in recent weeks have made some staff feel frustrated and devalued, that is something we profoundly regret. Our challenges are urgent and real, and we have attempted to provide information about them on a timely, transparent, and direct basis. But we can always do better, and we will work to do so in the future. In the meantime, we understand and appreciate your concerns, and we are deeply grateful for the superb efforts that UVM staff members make each and every day.

Now, let us respond to each of the issues raised in your memorandum of March 18.

- 1) FY 2012 Budget Proposal. In the budget memo we sent out last week, we attempted to give the campus an overview of the current condition of the budget, as well as our current thinking about how to address our shortfall. While we recognize that the timing of the memo may have been difficult for some, we felt an obligation to share the information with the University community immediately following its release to the Board of Trustees. We expect that the revenue picture will remain fluid and our plans may need further adjustment. To be clear: both unionized and non-unionized individuals will be affected by our budget challenges, but we cannot and should not try to predict the outcome of the collective bargaining process before it is completed. Indeed, you should also understand that we operate under ground rules that prohibit us from commenting about the negotiations and the proposals on the table at this time, so any response must be circumscribed by this ground rule. We simply do not know yet what the outcome will be, and whatever the result, we will be working hard to see to it that non-

unionized staff are treated fairly. We will keep the community informed of developments as they occur.

2) Market Mixed Messages. We regret the frustration that may be related to the perception that “UVM is in better financial standing than it was during the most challenging days of the recession” and take it as a sign that we must do a better job communicating complex budget information. One message that has been conveyed, and which we believe is still true, is that UVM is in better shape than most institutions of higher education. We have avoided widespread layoffs, furloughs, extreme budget reductions, and wholesale departmental eliminations, all of which have occurred at many other institutions. The financial situation, however, remains very difficult, with the State of Vermont’s budget highly constrained in the wake of the continuing recession and the removal of stimulus funding from the federal government. Add to that the elimination of federal earmarks and the pressing need for student financial aid, and there remain some very significant budget challenges for the University.

3) School of Business Administration Dean and Partner. Without question, the compensation for Drs. Sanjay and Pramodita Sharma has drawn attention. Certainly we are not interested in paying more than we need to for talented people, but their contracts are simply what the national/international market in which we compete demands. Please rest assured that these are spectacularly qualified individuals, each of whom stands as a distinguished academic in his or her own right, and we fully expect that the return on this investment, both for the Business School and the University, will be great. It may be helpful for us to offer a context for how these salaries will be funded, and we do so now. Dean Sharma’s salary will be funded by existing general funds housed both in the School of Business base budget and a central base budget. These funds have been specifically earmarked for this purpose as the search for a new Dean unfolded over the last several years. The funding for Professor Sharma’s salary will come from existing faculty funding in the School of Business base budget that has been released as a result of faculty retirements.

4) Post Retirement Medical Benefits. We are sensitive to your criticism of the timing of this announcement and regret that it may have diminished our heretofore diligent efforts to keep you advised and to include you throughout the entire process. As mentioned earlier, we felt compelled to share this information with the University community immediately upon its release to the Board of Trustees. Our system of shared governance and our desire for transparency make it difficult to release information in a way that is pleasing to all, but we will work to improve this process.

5) March 7, 2011 Snowstorm Closing. We accept responsibility for a less-than-satisfactory decision-making and communication process with respect to the storm closing. It was certainly not our intent to be disrespectful to our staff or to compromise the safety of *any* member of our community. As you know we are

reviewing and revamping processes so that we are not subject to similar communication difficulties in the future. You have our sincerest apologies for the events of March 7.

6) Administrative Business Service Center. This Center has been established without creating additional expense, and it is expected to greatly increase the efficiency and accuracy of our administrative work. The funding for the personnel and the operating budget for the Center came from the reallocation of funds from existing budgets of the units that are being served by it. Therefore, the creation of the Center did not increase the University's budget. When the FY 12 budget has been completed, Richard Cate will provide Staff Council with a summary that details the above reallocations.

7) Student Success and Satisfaction. Staff are absolutely central to the satisfaction and success of our students, and that is evident every day in all corners of campus. Although there was not a specific question in the survey on student interactions with staff, the fact is that students have extensive interaction with staff at all levels. The questions on campus climate, including a specific question that asked about the "Extent to which the campus is a welcoming community for all, regardless of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation," are clearly reflective of our staff's contributions. The consultants' presentation was oriented to areas we need to improve to achieve our strategic goals, as these presentations usually do, and didn't focus as much on the things we are already doing well. That said, as you'll remember the consultants started the presentation with the following observation: "Finally, retention success is also due to the University's ability to create and sustain an environment that students highly value: one that is welcoming, respectful of differences, and that offers many opportunities for engagement on campus and within the Burlington community." This statement provides additional validation of the commitment our staff members bring toward enhancing student success and satisfaction every day. We want to assure you that the basis of our efforts to enhance the student experience is both to sustain what we are doing well and strategically to address areas that need improvement, and staff are absolutely critical to our success. Chris Lucier would welcome an opportunity to share the entire survey as well as all the results with your executive committee, and to answer any additional questions you may have.

We hope we have addressed your concerns, and thank you for raising them. We greatly appreciate the efforts and commitment of UVM Staff, and the valuable working relationship we have enjoyed with you and the Staff Council. Challenging times heighten the need to communicate information in a way that does not cause frustration or create unease. We will do our best to be sensitive to, and understanding of, the needs and hopes of the staff in the future.