December 2012 Commencement Ceremony

Good morning graduates! As President of Staff Council, I am pleased and honored to address you on behalf of more than 2,000 staff members who work at the University of Vermont. In our various roles, we have been with you throughout your academic journey, and we now join you in celebrating your success on this truly special occasion.

We know how hard you’ve worked to reach this moment and we applaud your efforts. The staff at UVM have also worked hard to, provide you with the highest quality service and support in reaching your goals at UVM. The quality of the services we provide is every bit as important as the quality of the education you receive. And like you, we never stop learning. We take workshops and classes, attend conferences and lectures, and earn advanced degrees.

Just last week I attended a class offered by UVM Learning Services titled Exploring Traits of a Leader. Participants in the class included staff members from Conferences & Events, Custodial Services, Physical Plant, Career Services and staff representing several different academic units across campus. In discussing the traits of leadership, the trainer referred to Our Common Ground, the document of aspirations and shared values for the UVM Community which was endorsed by the University of Vermont Board of Trustees. Many of us have this document displayed in our work places.

The values identified in Our Common Ground include: Respect, Integrity, Innovation, Openness, Justice and Responsibility. The trainer divided the class into groups and each group was assigned one of these values. We were then asked to write down what we thought our assigned value meant. We were struck by how frequently the same words came up for the different values. For example, honesty is a trait of openness as it is for Integrity. In other words, these ethics are an integral part of who we are at UVM as we strive to embody the values and principles of Our Common Ground.

Before you leave UVM, take a few minutes to read Our Common Ground and then think about what it means for you as you take the next step in your life journey. And I have one other request: that you take these values with you when you leave here and apply them wherever you go. Just think what a better place the world would be if everyone practiced Respect, Integrity, Innovation, Openness, Justice and Responsibility.

Good luck and congratulations.

Catherine E. Symans

Staff Council President