We wish to reflect on significant accomplishments of the past year, speak to a number of ongoing efforts, and highlight several areas of concern to non-represented staff. We will do this by expressing our thinking under three main headings: words of appreciation, areas for focus and improvement, and thoughts on moving forward.

Words of Appreciation

Through the Staff Council, non-represented staff have enjoyed regular access to key administrators and an increased role in decision-making processes. We wish to acknowledge that we have been entrusted with consistent and high-level participation in the governance process of the University community and express our sense that both we and the community are richer for it.

The 2% raise for staff is a welcomed proposition, and though many of us are finding it difficult to make ends meet in the midst of rising food and energy prices, we are grateful that the budget proposal is for an across-the-board increase for all non-represented staff. We also wish to express our appreciation for a generous benefit package, including tuition remission, that continues to make The University of Vermont an attractive employer.

We also voice our sincere appreciation for:

- The Presidential Search Process. We are grateful for the transparency and broad participation that characterized the entire search process. This process—in which the Staff Council played an important role—was welcomed by staff and serves as a useful model for shared decision-making.
• **Interim President Bramley’s Holiday Party.** We appreciate the effort to gather together faculty and staff in a relaxed atmosphere outside the work environment to build a sense of community among all University employees.

• **Response to Tropical Storm Irene.** We are proud of the University community’s response to the havoc wreaked by the storm and the ongoing work to serve and assist those impacted.

• **Strategic Initiatives Project.** We value the thought and energy being invested in planning the future of the University and support the emphasis on growth and long-term solutions. We especially wish to thank Provost Knodell for hosting two SIP cafés with the Staff Council in order to gather staff feedback.

• **University Communication.** We appreciate the work done to improve communication of University emergencies and closings. We are also grateful for the development of News You Should Know as a single source for news of general interest to the University. We look forward to the continued development of these and other communication initiatives.

• **Comprehensive Diversity Professional Development Initiative.** We are encouraged by the commitment our University leaders have pledged in support of building a community where diversity and inclusion are values we aspire to live out in our work, research and studies. We applaud the promise of our senior leaders to engage in continuous and ongoing professional development on diversity, inclusion and social justice in order to lead UVM by example.

• **Educational and Cultural Opportunities.** We appreciate the opportunity to participate in a variety of events, conferences and lectures at the University as our schedules and workloads allow. These opportunities not only deepen our knowledge but they broaden our perspective on the world in important ways that help further the University’s mission.

• **Transportation Demand Management.** We are grateful for the time that Transportation and Parking Services has invested in listening and responding to the UVM community’s needs.

• **Capital Investments.** We applaud the strategic investments made in new and existing facilities, including the LEED-certified projects.

• **Professional Development.** We acknowledge the Administration’s stated commitment to professional development (EDU@UVM, HRS Learning Services, The Center for Teaching and Learning, tuition remission, etc.) even as we recognize that this area requires ongoing attention.

### Areas for Focus and Improvement

**Staff Morale.** We are greatly concerned about staff morale in general. We all recognize that morale is not what it could be and know that a great deal of work remains to be done in this area. (We speak to this briefly below under the heading “Thoughts on Moving Forward.”)

**Workforce Capacity Issues.** We acknowledge that there are areas where the University can save money through restructuring and the reorganization of work. We also recognize that there are many areas of the institution already experiencing significant workforce capacity issues, with fewer people being asked to do more work. In this kind of environment, strategic work is often left undone, staff have little or no time for important professional development, and individuals suffer more frequent burnout and other health problems. We believe a serious capacity issue exists that needs focused attention.
Post-Retirement Medical Benefits. We acknowledge that there have been difficult decisions to make and we are appreciative of the opportunities that staff have had to participate in the process. While we were pleased with the two-year timeframe that allows space for eligible individuals to make a thoughtful decision about retirement, we find it unfortunate that the morale and trust of some long-term employees have been greatly compromised. Although we recognize that changes to healthcare at the state or national level may impact this conversation again as early as 2014, it does not change the fact that many employees with numerous years of service are feeling undervalued and unappreciated for all that they have contributed to UVM throughout their careers.

Faculty and Staff Relations. We support leadership that seeks equity between staff and faculty in ways that are appropriate and inclusive. We encourage the scheduling of community-building events and the creation of initiatives to break down the walls that in some parts of campus divide staff from faculty in ways that are not healthy for the community or affirming for individuals.

In addition, we wish to express our concerns related to:

- **A reasonable provision for parental leave for staff.** We encourage the Administration to consider a paid parental leave program (maternity and paternity) for all employees—not just for faculty. We also strongly support the creation of more childcare facilities on campus.

- **Better management of change.** One of the most frequent critiques of change on campus is that communication often seems like an afterthought. The recent changes to Wellness and the Employee Assistance Program are important examples, as are the times when we have read important University news in the Burlington Free Press before we have received it internally. Both major and minor changes must be communicated to the University community consistently in order to encourage a culture of transparency, openness, engagement and trust.

- **Mandatory, standardized performance appraisals for all staff.** The majority of staff agree that undergoing annual performance appraisals would allow for benchmarking professional growth, provide the necessary data to support merit pay, and support better communication between staff and their supervisors. The University can no longer shy away from the use of the word “mandatory,” and a system of accountability must be included in these efforts.

- **Mandatory supervisory training.** We acknowledge that many supervisors end up in their positions due to their subject knowledge, not their ability to manage employees. We believe that mandatory supervisory training coupled with continual professional development will result in a healthier work environment for everyone.

- **Implementation of a career path program.** Staff often have difficulty understanding what career progression would look like in their personal context and would greatly appreciate assistance in this area of professional development.

- **Standardized hiring search processes.** The development of a standardized hiring search process that includes diversity requirements and allows for subject/department flexibility is highly desirable.

- **Better support for creating and maintaining web pages.** Staff in the colleges and departments are not typically hired to do web work, yet employees with little training are often expected to become experts in this field in addition to their other duties.
• **Replacement schedule for computer hardware and equipment.** Some employees are working with significantly outdated hardware and software. In order to maintain efficiency and high productivity, we encourage the Administration to consider implementing a campus-wide technology replacement schedule and to build accountability into established policies to ensure that equipment is disposed of properly.

• **Safe space for all individuals.** As recognized by The President’s Commission on Diversity and Inclusion, the University culture often fails to provide safe space for persons who stand outside the University’s predominant social, political or religious groups, beliefs and values. It is important that this culture change so that we provide safe, caring space for all aspects of everyone’s identity grounded in a sense of caring, in order that all persons might feel welcomed and valued in this community.

**Thoughts on Moving Forward**

Staff Council has experienced an expanded role in decision-making processes. We appreciate this development, believing that it not only highlights the important contributions staff make at all levels of the University, but it sends a message that staff are valued. We contend that staff morale will continue to improve as we are routinely invited to participate in all processes that affect the UVM community, and believe that the dialogue that flows from such inclusion will do much to build trust and confidence in University leadership.

*We cannot emphasize enough the importance of frequent and clear communication—and not just in times of difficulty.* We understand that it is not simply what is communicated by the Administration, but how and when it is communicated that matters. We also recognize that the UVM community is often told “what,” but not “why,” and thus we emphasize the importance of large decisions being given proper context so that they are better understood by each of us.

While we readily affirm the primacy of the faculty to the educational enterprise, we also recognize that many staff would be considered “professionals” outside this higher education establishment. We encourage a commitment to a socially just community where faculty and staff can stand and serve shoulder to shoulder without reference to the categories that sometimes divide and separate us. We believe that it would revolutionize the morale of staff and their sense of place in the community we all love if we begin to dismantle the barriers that foster an “us versus them” mentality.

As we have indicated, we are appreciative of a great many positive developments and promising initiatives at the University. We also have our share of concerns (the greatest of which we have itemized above) but our outlook on the future of this Institution is as bright as it has ever been. We are grateful for an Administration that listens and seeks to really hear, and we look forward to continuing to serve together with you in the days to come. Our dream is that together we might work to move The University of Vermont forward to become the kind of place that this missive envisions.