March 5, 2014

To: Tom Sullivan, President
    David Rosowsky, Provost and Senior Vice President

From: Catherine Symans, Staff Council President
      Renee Berteau, Staff Council Vice President

Re: Staff Council Collection and Summary of Feedback on Benefits Cost Share Review.

The Staff Council has collected 27 pages of comments, questions and concerns from UVM staff regarding the review of UVM Benefits Cost Share by the University Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC), and ultimately, by you and your team. The time span of the input is from February 4 through February 27. During that time, the benefits on the table for discussion changed from health care, dependent tuition remission and retirement savings to just health care, but we have included all this feedback for your awareness.

We were pleased to be able to aid the process the UBAC established to receive input. And we appreciate that input from employees was sought to aid the decisions to be made. Many provided their best advice even while recognizing that a higher benefits cost share for all employees was going to be the outcome.

We would like to highlight some common themes that came from our review of staff comments and concerns:

- The rollout of the input process seemed hurried, the feedback was requested without any concrete examples to view, and having UBAC do the review rather than Administration implies a lack of sensitivity to the significance of benefits to staff.

- Staff have often been asked to focus on their “Total Compensation” rather than just salary, in how they regard their pay at UVM. They feel that if there is an increase in the amount they must pay toward a benefit, it is a reduction to their total compensation, which is difficult in these economic times.

- Many staff chose to work for UVM at a lower pay rate than the private sector because of UVM’s generous, socially-conscious benefits. Increasing the cost share percentage is perceived as a reduction of the benefits, and current staff feel it goes against what they were promised and presented when making a decision to accept a position at the University.
• Long-term, lower paid employees cannot afford to take any reduction in pay, regardless of whether it is by increasing benefits cost share, or not giving cost of living increases in pay.

• Cost share increases should only be considered for higher paid employees (various thresholds were mentioned, but exist in current benefits at UVM).

• Some non-unionized staff feel they are at a higher risk and more vulnerable due to unknowns involving union contract negotiations at the University, as information presented by the UBAC indicated that changes would depend on the outcome of these negotiations. For non-unionized staff and faculty, we should not be held back by contracts with unions and it is important that all employees are equitably impacted.

• There are those staff members (non-unionized and unionized alike) who are concerned that they will be most directly impacted by any changes to benefits cost share. This concern underscores the belief by many staff that faculty continue to be more valued and appreciated by the Administration.

In summary, while we believe that there has been an increase in transparency and openness at the University on many issues and initiatives, we also recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done in order for our community to have confidence in decisions that are made by our leaders. Employees who are informed, included, and respected during these processes are employees who will remain loyal to the University and its future. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we want to retain quality employees who are important to the continued success of UVM.

cc: Jan Carney, Chair, University Benefits Advisory Council
Kelly Circe, Staff Council Appointed Representative to the University Benefits Advisory Council
Gary Derr, Vice President for Executive Operations
Barbara Johnson, Associate Vice President for Human Resource Services
Debra Stern, Staff Council Appointed Representative to the University Benefits Advisory Council
The Staff Council has collected the following comments, questions, and concerns from UVM staff regarding the Benefits Cost Share Review process by the University Benefits Advisory Council. These comments are in their original form. All names and further identifying information have been removed for confidentiality purposes. It is the hope of the Staff Council that these comments will further highlight the points we have made regarding this process and its impact on all UVM employees.

**February 27, 2014**

I just wanted to share that I disagree with the cost sharing proposal. A big part of the reason I chose to work at UVM was because of the UVM community and the benefit packaged offered to me. Increasing my medical expense will negatively me financially. I don't feel that this change should affect current employees of UVM - perhaps a policy for new hires is the right approach?

It would be helpful if this discussion can be publicly framed as what it really is: a pay cut for staff, some of whom went several years without so much as a cost of living raise. We can’t afford to “take one for the team” anymore.

Especially not for a team that acts like a cash-strapped state school when it’s time to trim the budget, and like Harvard when hiring faculty and filling upper-level administrative positions. Increasing the health insurance cost share percentage for University staff is shameful given the extravagant salaries paid to the provost, the business dean, professor Fogel, and others.

Do not act surprised when unions take over UVM.

**February 25, 2014**

I am already struggling to meet basic living expenses and any additional health care premiums would be detrimental to my family. If percentage goes up, have it go up for folks that get paid more as it should not be as damaging to their pocket.

The cost share change should not affect low-paid employees at all.

**February 24, 2014**

I would like to respond to requests for staff to give their feedback on the cost sharing formulas that are coming to us in order for the university to save money. If there is a decision to increase our share of paying for health care, I would like to comment that our salaries seem to be going down instead of up over the years. I am almost 60 years old, and have to still work a second job to make ends meet. I think it will be very very unfair if employees on the lower end of the pay scale need to pay more, but people at the top do not. I feel there should be no exception...if
someone is making a 6-figure salary, their cost sharing should be a percentage of their total salary just like all other staff members. Thanks for listening.

As long as we all bear an equal share, I would agree to pay more of a percentage toward my health care. I would hope that the rates would continue to reflect amounts that are based on salary.

I do realize that Health Benefits are going up, however the 1 to 2 percent increases we receive will not offset this health care increase. Also our increases are not based on performance, which do not make sense to me. The small increases in pay are usually offset by some other increase.

February 20, 2014

I just want to put in my “two-cents” in regards to the proposed changes for staff benefits. I understand that tuition remission was taken off the discussion table (my youngest is graduating out of state so that is not important to me now), however, I feel that employees should contribute something or have a two year waiting period for the benefit. Many people apply to UVM just so their kids can go free. They should pay their “dues” with a waiting period and the amount of remission should be tied to income levels.

I heard that health insurance contribution is the main issue being considered. This is the area that is most important to me. The proposed increase (20-30%) will have a significant impact on my income and ability to make ends meet financially. I have a family plan and am very concerned how I will make ends meet with that great of an increase. I understand that we all have to give something to the cost and I am willing to do that. UVM has been very generous in the past and I am very grateful. Please consider a lower percent increase and make it on an income-graduated scale to be fair.

Another fringe cost cutting possibility is to wait four years for UVM retirement contributions. Grandfathering is also a nice gesture, starting changes with new hires. It seems like the lower pay spectrum feels the financial pinch the hardest. Please keep that in mind when you decide contribution amounts.

I wonder how this will change the conversation around total compensation package? Since I have been here, HRS has framed conversations around competitive staff salaries with discourse of the total package that staff get through all the benefits. Business managers and supervisors have been asked to talk about that every year before new salary figures are released. So, if the benefits are being reduced, then it feels like we’ve been fed a bunch of corporate spin for the past 6 years. How does this speak to the integrity and honesty that are part of Our Common Ground?

Before a decision is made, and for the sake of transparency; which is another big buzz word with the Administration; could we request cost savings analysis comparisons with the different scenarios to really know how much savings it would be for the University?

Personally, let those who make over six figures take the biggest reduction.

I am retiring on March 31, 2014. As I will be on a fixed income, I am concerned about myself and all retirees having to pay higher costs for our insurances. I know that we are very fortunate to
pay what we do, however, the cost of living goes up and our compensation does not match that increase. I believe that retirees should be grandfathered and pay the rate at the time they retired.

February 19, 2014

Just wanted to share a few thoughts on the proposed changes to the cost share formulas for tuition remission, healthcare, and retirement savings benefits. I do understand UVM faces budgetary challenges and some tough decisions need to be made. Here is how I feel these changes will affect the UVM community from a staff perspective. From my perspective I am an employee that is thankful for what UVM has done for me and I support both Staff Council and the Administration. I believe UVM is a great employer who cares about staff.

Healthcare Benefits: Even though recent increases in benefit costs to UVM staff have negated some of the salary increases for staff in recent years, the rising costs of healthcare is a huge challenge for UVM.

I place blame for healthcare costs solely on the broken healthcare system. This is one area where UVM has little control and staff should reasonably expect periodic increases. I feel that UVM has done all it can along with Staff Council to try and control healthcare costs. But UVM staff should expect future restrained increases.

Tuition Remission: I feel this is a great benefit that UVM has given to employees. It is sort of a gift benefit that is not tied to overall compensation as directly as healthcare and retirement. UVM staff should expect some cost sharing in the future during times of economic challenges. There will be some employees that would terminate their employment without this benefit but not all staff have children of college age so this does not affect the whole community. It does affect those staff with children in college so the benefit should remain until current tuition remission students graduate. However this is one area where employees could expect some cost sharing and still be grateful this benefit exists at all.

Retirement Savings: Of the three proposed cost sharing benefits, cut in retirement savings will have the most negative impact for staff and morale. For UVM staff with many years of service the retirement savings contribution made by UVM is directly tied to total compensation. For many years UVM salaries have been below market scale for salaries but more competitive when compared to total compensation. Retirement savings is the most critical component of total compensation other than salary. This would directly impact near 100% of full time staff. UVM has total control over how much they contribute and external forces are less a factor as with healthcare. Cutting this benefit would be the most painful to staff and the total compensation package would be much less competitive compared to other markets. UVM could potentially lose highly qualified employees to more competitive compensation packages. Not to mention this would be the most painful to staff because staff have made future retirement savings plans and future decisions based on a retirement strategy that depends on 10% contribution from UVM. Cutting this benefit in any way would be demoralizing the greatest number of staff at UVM. Cutting retirement contributions and impacting retirement plans for a significant number of staff would be destructive to morale. If any changes need to be made to UVM’s contribution levels it should be the last resort before all other options are considered. Any for UVM staff with many years of service this is like taking away something they have already earned. The only acceptable compromise would be to make the contribution less for NEW employees to capture future savings. Reducing this benefit for long time staff who have based retirement strategies on a 10% contribution would be in effect an insult to long term staff
with 10+ year of service. All our salaries are tied directly to total compensation and a decrease in retirement contributions by UVM is in effect a salary DECREASE.

I attended the February 10th forum on benefit cost changes. First of all, changes in the cost of these benefits to staff mean the same thing as changes in benefits or compensation. You can’t sugar coat it. Cost is a big part of benefits. We see our paychecks eroded time and time again when there are changes in cost share, especially for medical benefits. Any small raise in pay that we receive goes to paying increases in costs of benefits.

Many of us chose to work and chose to stay at the University NOT for the salary but for the benefits. As you begin to bring UVM benefits closer and closer to those at other places of employment, there will be no real impetus for “good” employees to single out UVM and to stay on year after year and remain loyal to UVM.

Second, I really don’t think it was very fair to ask us as a group to choose among three benefits as to which one was most important or which we’d pay more for. All 3 of those benefits are extremely valuable to staff. Furthermore, each employee is at a different stage in life and a benefit that is important to one staff person may not be as important to another. Someone suggested that a survey sent to all employees might have been a better method.

Third, I think it is obvious which of the 3 benefits on the table needs to be addressed at this time. The cost of tuition remission ($5 million) and retirement savings ($17 million) combined does not even touch the cost of medical benefits ($39 million and rising) for the University. If medical benefits were your real target, you should have been more transparent and said so. Then we could have put our voices and efforts into discussing medical benefits.

I was intrigued with the suggestion that an employee had for a cafeteria-style benefits package where a staff person pays a little more for one benefit while taking advantage of another one at lower cost. While my daughter is attending UVM, maybe I would pay a little more for medical or reduce the percentage that UVM kicks into my retirement.

I have worked at the University for 30 years. I had always hoped to retire at 55 or soon thereafter, but I was hit with the PRMB changes and can no longer attain that goal. Retiring staff with FEWER years of service than I have are able to take medical benefits with them at age 55 or more. That doesn’t make sense to me and my morale has dropped considerably because of that. I have one child who is now attending UVM tuition free. I appreciate that and think it is an amazing benefit. I do not want to lose that. You need to compensate those long-term staff who lost out on PRMB benefits by grandfathering our other benefits.

For the record, I would gladly give up the Employee Assistance program, Staff Appreciation Week gifts and meals, Verizon Wireless discounts, edu@uvm, and other development and wellness programs that although are important to maintaining healthy, dedicated, and informed staff are of lesser importance to me than dependent tuition remission, retirement savings, and medical insurance.

February 14, 2014
Thank you for soliciting staff feedback on the changes to the benefit cost share.

Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to provide you with any meaningful feedback without some concrete examples of the changes under consideration. As someone who does not have children, I do not have a stake in the dependent tuition remission program but I cannot evaluate
the relative impact of an UNKNOWN change in healthcare cost share with an UNKNOWN change in the retirement plan.

Finally the statement "Important to note here is that there is no intention to change the benefits themselves, just the cost share formulas," while possibly semantically accurate is disingenuous and extremely misleading. Changing the amount that the University contributes to these benefits fundamentally changes the benefits themselves. No one would consider an employer that contributed 10% to a retirement fund and an employer that contributed 1% to have the same benefits just because offered a retirement benefit. Short of eliminating the programs all together, the University portion of the cost share IS the benefit.
February 13, 2014

I have worked for UVM since 1999. I purposely came to UVM for tuition remission and the other benefits and took a substantial pay cut. I had to convince my children that this was the right choice for them, which wasn't easy. We budgeted for the room and board which is not insubstantial. We did not budget for more. My daughter is now halfway through UVM and what am I supposed to do? I feel violated in this whole discussion about cost share as it doesn't factor in the cost share we contributed by taking a lower pay.

I feel that changing the formula mid-career and particularly with such short notice is a violation of trust and is akin to breach of contract. Some people may be able to make adjustments in their budget that quickly, but that is not true for the majority of employees.

When they speak of needing to pay such high salaries, bonuses and benefits to administration to attract the best is degrading. UVM needs to pay comparable salaries and benefits to attract the best to do the work that students come to UVM for, an education. It is also important to recognize the benefit to the community having UVM offspring going to UVM. UVM's argument against reciprocal tuition remission was that we don't want to have a brain drain. That our children were presumed to be motivated and smart and if they went out of state, they would be more likely to settle out of state. I think this poses a much greater risk of brain drain.

Thanks for listening. I hope that the administration is as willing to listen as your board is. It would show a greater commitment to the employees for the decision makers to attend some of these meetings and hear our words.

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One of my 2 sons graduated from UVM in 2006 with a Poly Sci degree and he would never have been able to afford to go to UVM without the tuition remission program. We paid for his room & board, books and other expenses and he was able to graduate debt-free. This enabled him to take a minimum wage job at Magic Hat in their warehouse, which ultimately led to a position in Marketing, and now he is totally self-sufficient. The younger son chose to attend the Univ. of Utah in Salt Lake City. We paid out-of-state tuition for his first 2 years (after 2 years he qualified for in-state tuition at the U of U) and his room & board, with him paying for his final 3 years of in-state tuition with the help of loans. He graduated in 2009, has a decent-paying job as a web developer, but has been struggling to pay back his loans and pay his living expenses. We have had to resort to taking over some of his loans which has cut into our savings for retirement. The result is me delaying retirement, as it is not an affordable option at this time.

If the Tuition Remission benefit was decreased, I think that the students would have to take out more loans for their college education, thereby having to make large loan repayments at a time when they were hopefully entering the job market. As in our case, the students’ parents might end up making the loan payments, in order to help their children.

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I would like to share my feelings about the benefits discussion. I came to UVM a year ago after being a nurse at FAHC for 6 years. I was diagnosed with breast cancer less than 2 years ago and my decision to become a UVM employee was based almost solely on the tuition remission part of the benefits package. I could have worked reduced hours as a benefited employee at FAHC, but instead opted to take a 40% pay cut and take a full-time position in Student Health Services at UVM. With three children, I felt the loss of income was offset by the unique value of the tuition remission benefit at UVM.

Reducing that benefit will constitute a real and unexpected burden on my family. If a benefit reduction must happen, I would urge that the university consider a grandfather clause that

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honors the benefit levels promised to current employees, while providing reduced benefits to incoming employees. I would also ask that the university consider the relative income of benefit recipients when considering the benefit structure.

I hope you will take my comments into consideration.

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I urge UBAC and Staff Council to communicate to our administration that - while I understand they are looking at all cost saving (or revenue generating) options across the University - employee benefits is the ONE area that should not be changed in such a way that UVM will require employees to pay more for the benefits we have. Administrators must look elsewhere and leave our benefits alone.

I cannot stress how important it is for UVM employees NOT be asked to pay more for health benefits...NOT be asked to pay more for dependent tuition benefits...and NOT have our retirement matching contributions decreased. On a personal level, I am a frugal breadwinner for my family and as it is I squeak by from paycheck to paycheck. I can't afford to take less money home.

I suggest administration take a closer look at inefficiencies at the unit levels, including salary and benefits spending at upper admin levels.

Please DO NOT start messing with staff employee benefits!

The message from attendees at the "town meetings" this week is proof positive that UVM must find other areas to save costs. If it doesn't, they are going to have extremely mad employees and staff morale is going to go down the drain.

I understand that the University needs to cut somewhere, but I am not sure that looking at staff benefits is the answer. That being said, I know that everything has to be looked at and evaluated. I attended the forum on Monday and listened intently to all that was said. There were many heartfelt comments expressed. I sincerely appreciate all that UVM has done for me in the six years that I have been employed here. I have always felt that I had job security, great benefits, a good work atmosphere, and many great people to work with. I want to say that I believe strongly in this University and the Staff Council. I know that this administration DOES CARE about staff and our value and have done a great job avoiding layoffs and cutting of our benefits. I understand that our benefits are outstanding. There is no disputing that fact. I feel that my salary and benefits were the promise made to me when I took this position, and I work very hard to keep my end of the bargain and fulfill my promise to the University. In my time here, we have had years without a cost of living increase, but that was okay because the overall package was enough. We were all willing to tighten our belts and understood that we were doing this for the good of the whole.

Asking us to let you know which benefit is the most important is a very hard request. Our benefits are all very valuable and the most important one would depend greatly upon which stage of life you are in. I would guess the answer will vary. I guess my best suggestion would be, if necessary, to cut the retirement benefit by 1% and ask for the staff contribution to be raised 1%. This would set the employee contribution at 3% and the University at 9%. Although these changes are not described as a cut, please know that I know that if any of the proposed changes are made, it would be significant cut for employees. But again, we would tighten the belt once again to preserve the benefits which make this such an amazing place to work.
Another thought would be to have the tuition remission benefit in place after three years of employment, this would be consistent with the contributions to the retirement account. It would reward the long term dedicated staff.

I have confidence in the administration at UVM to do what is right and fair for the hard working staff.

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I did go to the gathering in Memorial Lounge and it was all good. I know we are about to face changes and I know they have been put off so whenever you put off - it always comes back. But I was one of the kind that left a better paying job so my kids could enjoy the free tuition. One son has graduated and I have a daughter that is a Sophomore here now. I feel very fortunate that I have gotten this far but I hope they can hit other avenues before changing this one. As I know there are many good people here who need it and are working forward to the day when they can benefit from it.

Thank you for your time and please share my story.

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Staff foolishly has let themselves become a non-represented group on campus and left us a sitting duck for unilateral cuts and changes.

The Town Hall opportunity is a layer of opaqueness between staff and the decision makers - UBAC is just a smoke screen so management doesn't have to actually talk to us. This is not a negotiation and we are foolish to think so. Otherwise they would have come to us with ideas, a survey of possibilities, feedback from their meetings, and a range of suggestions. That's how things used to be done around here. This is just letting us gripe before they make unilateral decisions.

It's late in the game for this process to start - February for a July roll out- one can only assume most of the decisions have been made, knowing budgets are drafted years in advance.

UVM has always been a place where the excellent benefits compensated for the less than competitive wages compared to other similar universities, but now we have lost wages over the past several years + increased cost share - continued below cost of living wage increases (if any at all) = lost wages.

We have sacrificed pay raises many times in the 14 years I have been here from 3% raises we had in the past, to as low as zero%, or 1%. While faculty and leadership with iron clad contracts keep their benefits, raises, and are not asked to do more with less, as more and more administrators are added all the time.

"Doing more with less", means less training, fewer staff, more projects, more detailed paperwork, less expertise in offices, less support, more stress, and an erosion of structure, organization, communication, and respect for each other...which means a loss of morale. As attrition positions are filled with lower wage, less experienced workers that will just get worse, as wages determine the quality of people we can hire, and our beautiful professional university will become just another marginalized underfunded organization, with the bosses taking off with the money. They obviously haven't been able to make the University more successful, even with their big salaries and inflated reputations.

All the while there are people who suffer here with no help for untrained and unskilled managers, work place conflict, lack of integrity among managers and staff, insensitivity to health and personal difficulties, inequity among classification wages, threats of losing important mid-
level administrators like business managers, a powerless HR department, and more and more salaries for upper echelon administrators.

It should be either or....do more with less, or lower wages...not both.

It's income inequality plain and simple. We are being forced to take it, but that doesn't make it right. Top leadership should be the first to take a cut across the board. There should be effective evaluation and assessment policies for everyone conducted by HR trained professionals...not supervisors who are afraid their staff might look better than they do, or use the process as a personal vendetta, and the deadwood should be cleared out - from the top down.

Job performance matters! We should be striving to be on this list:
www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/20/best-colleges-to-work-at-glassdoor-2013_n_3964114.html

And take a look at the Burlington area economy based on several good employers - UVM being a primary driver. Would the housing market be so inflated if it weren't for the success of the University, huge tax increases, high rent, groceries, entertainment, services....we are part of the community that is based on the wages of the thousands of people who work here. We have a responsibility to our community, but we are headed for wages that will make it impossible to be successful in Burlington.

I don't think it matters though - this isn't a negotiation, these are still relatively good VT jobs, and most of us will just deal with it. This is a very unprofessional and anxiety producing way to address these issues when a more transparent process could have actually given us a voice...not just a gripe.

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Apparently, I'll not receive any response from the UBAC, nor have any of the questions I asked or issues I raised been addressed on the UBAC FAQ page. Perhaps someone from Staff Council could shed some light on my concerns.

Monday's presentation was billed as a 'conversation,' but, by definition, that implies 2-way communication. That simply didn't happen. What I heard was the UBAC Committee asking staff to identify what benefit is most important to individuals to facilitate their recommendations (this was their way of asking us to identify groups who we would 'throw under the bus'); nearly every speaker stood up to say ALL three benefits are important to UVM staff.

Changes are coming, and you assure us that you will advocate for non-represented staff. I'm not really sure what you mean by that. Quoting the Staff Council's webpage, "... the University has worked to keep benefit packages the same across represented and non-represented Faculty and Staff in the past and it is Staff Council's understanding that this will remain the goal of the University moving forward. Although any changes to cost share of benefits would be brought to the bargaining table for those employees represented by a union." [emphasis added] How can you say you are advocating for staff when you rely on understandings and vague goals of the University? The administration will do whatever it needs to do to implement cost shares; any employees represented by a BARGAINING unit have a greater voice than those who do not have a seat at a bargaining table. Staff Council serves in an ADVISORY capacity, and the administration is under no constraint whatsoever to listen to that advice. All too often, Staff Council simply echoes the voice of the administration to the detriment of non-represented staff.

I would very much appreciate hearing from someone who can address my concerns.

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I am writing to request that you represent my feelings on potentially changing benefits for employees. I am firmly against any reduction in benefits including Retirement, Healthcare and Tuition Remission. If there is a need to make cuts, they can start in a reduction of administrative bloat. UVM has a long standing reputation as a good employer. These benefits are compensatory for wages lower than industry. One of the success features in our labor pool is loyalty. Please make my view heard loud and clear.

Here is something that I'm sure is not considered in budget discussions. I'm lucky enough to work in a college that is a growth center for undergraduate admissions among other things. Since I started working here, our undergraduate and internal transfer numbers have grown and grown while our salary and benefits have remained pretty much stagnant. (And btw, I don't think the 2% raises we've gotten in the years we did get salary increases are anywhere near COLA) we have already been doing more for less. It's really hard to be asked on top of that to pay more for the benefits we earn.

Working in at an academic institution like UVM, I have had to accept that my salary will be lower than if I chose to work in the private sector. However, a major offset to that lower salary has been the benefits provided: such as healthcare coverage, dependent tuition remission, and retirement savings. Those benefits are a huge motivating factor to remain working here, despite the lower salary and salary growth opportunities. I don't feel like UVM will be a competitive employer without these benefits.

I really don't want to lose any health or retirement benefits. I would be willing to pay an extra percent or two towards my healthcare benefits (although that wouldn't be my first choice).

I would like the biggest savings (to the University) be in the form of a larger cost share for tuition remission: Employees would still be covered 100% and Dependents would get a reduction of 50% - 75% towards their tuition.

I am concerned that staff paychecks are shrinking because the small cost of living increases (when we get them) are being swallowed by increase in benefit costs. I know this is a problem across the board but it really hurts us little people who don't make as much as faculty and administrators. It is ironic that the President and Provost, who are among the highest paid at UVM are starting these initiatives. There needs to be more equity among salaries at UVM. The divide between the rich and the poor that is happening in America is also happening at UVM on many different levels.

February 12, 2014

I'm writing to express my thoughts on the UBAC review of cost share on selected University benefits.

Background: I am a 20 year employee at UVM. I began working here right out of college to begin my career in marketing and communications. I started at a salary of 9,700 in 1993, one of the lowest pay levels at UVM at the time. I took this job over others because it would allow me to practice and use my education on a daily basis, gain experience and I could provide healthcare benefits to my new husband and myself. I was willing to work at a rate LESS than retail was paying at the time for the OPPORTUNITY I saw at UVM versus other jobs. I have
learned much over the years, and have been able to work in my chosen field all of these years. Although I've yet to climb any sort career ladder here or make very much money here I remain loyal and love this campus, the learning environment and the potential for students who attend this school. So much so that this past year I took a 54% loss of income to return to UVM after my former UVM department turned into the UVM Foundation (which has its own separate benefits package – NOT UVM's). I justified this loss in my paycheck with the fact that I had so many years invested at UVM and two children (one middle-school and one high-school), whose **only** college plan includes tuition remission at UVM or one of the VT State Colleges, that these benefits would help offset this incredibly low salary in the long run. I am a single income household and I was willing to face the scary reality of taking that huge financial hit by coming back to UVM so that I could keep the tuition remission intact for my children and keep the years rolling along for retirement for me. I've been here since the beginning of my career and thus far dedicated 20 years of "sweat equity" for these benefits. I am not in a place financially where there is room to take much away.

Here are my thoughts on the specific proposed cost share areas:

**Healthcare Cost Share:** Although we've already incurred increases to healthcare costs this year I realize that this is a large expense line item for UVM, I hear that. That said, I feel this should be a significant number for UVM, as a healthy and well-insured group of employees we should yield a healthier and happier workforce and thereby a better and stronger UVM community. That's the goal we talk about and type of community and environment we say we are trying to achieve. If any changes are made here I feel like it needs to happen on a sliding scale, with no additional cost until further up the pay range.

**Dependent Tuition Remission:** An incredibly important benefit offered at UVM. Why wouldn't we encourage dependent tuition remission. If a university can't get behind supporting and encouraging education to families, what business are we in?? I do feel like there needs to be a closer look at the exchange rate between UVM employee dependents going to VT State Colleges versus VT State College employee dependents going to UVM. For example, if a Johnson State employee's child attends UVM that person receives a "greater benefit" than if a UVM employee child attending Johnson State does. Johnson's in-state tuition is significantly less than UVM's in-state tuition. So UVM is taking a loss every time a State College dependent takes a slot here at UVM. In effect, UVM is losing revenue or not getting a dollar for dollar exchange on those arrangements. I would ask for Administration or the budget office to take a closer look at these numbers and the arrangements. Perhaps this agreement needs to be re-negotiated before we change anything at our own campus to our own employees benefit package. If there were any changes to occur, a grandfather clause would need to go into effect for employees who have worked at least X number of years.

**Retirement Contributions:** I believe UVM has a great program here for the folks that can understand why to get on-board asap. I gave the basic 2 or 3% until UVM began contributing and then I jumped up to a much higher rate and have stayed at that rate for years. The only place I could see making changes is for new employees to start low and UVM to match low and then when an employee contributes at 5% or higher UVM jumps up to the 10% or something along those lines - creating incentives to contribute at a higher level.

In closing, while I can appreciate Administration's need to examine all areas of expense as we try to resolve this deficit, I do believe there are many, many smaller cost savings solutions rather than large slices into employee benefits. I'll also add that this UBAC process has been very strange in the way it was rolled out, or more appropriately, **not** rolled out to the community. Benefits are such a sensitive area I would think that the Administration would have taken more care in the way in which this whole review was handled. There could have been a much more
public announcement, there could have been information provided so that employees could have had a starting place to provide informed feedback from. Instead there was no information so employees just have to react from an emotional place of something being "taken away". I think the conversation could have been about how can we chip away at this debt in other ways besides carving away at benefits.

Unfortunately I believe a botched UBAC review might possibly make employees a bit more distrustful, frustrated or feel that being "non-represented" doesn't mean anything here and will fan the embers of union talk to a fire. I was really hoping that we didn't have to go down that path again.

Thank you for your time.

As an employee of UVM over the past five years I am extremely concerned of the discussion taking place to “review the cost share formulas” for the following UVM employee benefits: Healthcare Coverage, Dependent Tuition Remission, Retirement Savings Plan.

**Healthcare coverage** - Changing the cost share formula for Healthcare Coverage appears insincere when health care cost are supposed to be going down.

**Retirement Savings Plan** - Changing the cost share formula for Retirement Savings also seems insincere; this is a time when we are trying to get more individuals to save.

**Dependent Tuition Remission** - “UVM offers dependent tuition remission” this is what I was told when I interviewed at UVM. This benefit has been critical to my two sons as well as myself as a single parent, each of my children have been able to attend UVM. Both in medicine. Not only would “adjusting” this benefit in any way be totally devastating to so many families it would directly affect the education of many of our Vermont children. As I understand this review could have an effect as soon as this July 2014. For many of us tuition remission does not cover all cost of sending a student to UVM and we must also prepare FAFSA and VSAC applications, applying for grants, we are now going through that process preparing for next year in good faith. How do we make up for any discrepancies that may occur due to adjusting the cost share formula for tuition remission. How does any change not have an adverse effect on the Vermont students that attend UVM.

On June 30. 2011 I received a letter from my supervisor after not having received an increase in my salary for Fiscal Year 2012, this letter stated that “Although salary is a significant part of your total compensation, your benefits are also very important.

I have worked at UVM for one year and eight months. Upon being hired, I was extremely disappointed to find out how low my salary would be - certainly not a livable wage for the greater Burlington area and also a significant pay cut from my previous job. What helped to balance this out at least a little was the excellent benefits that UVM offers and how incredibly affordable they are.

I have a chronic medical condition which requires many expensive medications and frequent visits with specialists. All of the co-pays for this add up quickly and require me to put a sizable chunk of my paycheck into a medical fund. This fund is already tight and just barely covers my medical costs. There is no room to have my paycheck made smaller by having to pay more for my benefits.

If UVM increases the amount that employees are required to pay for benefits, I am not sure what I will do. My budget as a whole is already very tight. Cut my food budget? Cut my very
necessary medical budget? Cut my small amount of spending money? Cut my savings? None of these are acceptable options.

I haven’t even started my retirement fund through UVM because I cannot afford for more money to be taken out of my paycheck. This is also unacceptable since saving for retirement is crucial.

I realize that having employees contribute more towards benefits would save UVM money. However, for the vast majority of us, it would also create a significant hardship.

I truly love my job, and I don't think people can honestly say that very often. I absolutely do not want to find a new job, but if UVM can't provide a livable wage/benefits, what other choice would I have?

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February 11, 2014

With pending salary cuts and now the thought of losing tuition remission in my opinion, you will lose a large number of physicians from the college of medicine faculty. This would truly be penny wise and pound foolish – let’s hope it never gets to that.

I have worked at the University (in a number of different capacities – PT, Temp, FTE) and I very much value the tuition remission benefit. I want to express my concern that they are under consideration to be reduced or eliminated. While I do not have a family or dependents who utilize the tuition remission benefit, this is a value that I very much appreciate and plan to use in the future.

Working in an institution of Higher Education I recognize that the access this provides is really making a difference. From new American citizens, to service workers, staff and administration – this benefit means that a quality education is within reach of all UVM affiliates.

Please don’t let this access be limited or denied. Thank you.

There are rumors about what might be happening. If what I heard is true then it is just more unacceptable behavior from the UVM board and UVM administration. How many new buildings come before faculty and staff? Worst of all are the salaries, benefits, expenses and golden parachutes for everyone at the top while UVM does not pay their faculty and staff a fair wage. Take away anything from our benefits and you have just given all of us a decrease in the miserly and sometimes non-existent pay raises. Tuition remission is a major draw for many employees. Many people have stayed at UVM just for the excellent benefits. When I looked at my paycheck it always helped to know my children were attending UVM tuition free. Please make the cuts you need to make somewhere else!

Thank you.

February 10, 2014

Dear University Benefits Advisory Council and Staff Council,


**Healthcare Coverage:** Healthcare costs for low income employees is a huge expense. I do not think the formula for sharing healthcare costs should change for employees with annual salaries up to $120,000. For employees with annual salaries of $120,001+, I think a reasonable cost share formula would be to continue the increase of 2% per $10,000 of salary (used for employees earning between $40,000-$120,000).

Thus, employees with salaries between $120,001-$130,000 would see their cost share rate increase from 27% to 28%. Employees with higher incomes would share increasing amounts of
the costs until employees with annual salaries greater than $480,000 would pay the full cost. Please see the attached MS-Excel spreadsheet (under the Healthcare tab). I think this helps distribute the burden across those employees best able to pay the increased costs.

**Dependent Tuition Remission:** Everyone in education values education. Many take pay cuts to be in an environment that favors education and provides tuition remission for dependents. I do not think there should be any cost sharing of the tuition remission benefit.

**Retirement Savings Plan:** Most retirement specialist recommend a retirement savings rate of 15% of annual salary over a person’s career. Early savings are critical to the growth of retirement savings. Thus, I think it is crucial for lower income employees (who are usually younger) get at least the 10% contribution from UVM. For employees earning more than $50,000 (median U.S. household income), a gradual reduction of this contribution rate of 1% per $50,000 increase in salary seems reasonable. Please see the attached MS-Excel spreadsheet (under the Retirement Savings tab). I also think UVM should automatically enroll employees in the retirement savings plan upon employment. (Employees could fill out paperwork if they did not want to participate.) **Spreadsheet attached.**

I will be unable to attend the open forums on this topic but wanted to express my concerns. As someone who recruits Information Technology staff, I am particularly cognizant of the market pressures in Burlington. Our benefits are a strong recruiting tool—one that has swayed a number of highly experienced and highly qualified system and support staff. Chittenden County’s December unemployment rate was 3%. My staff is regularly under recruitment from the local market. Weakening the benefits package will result in getting less qualified and less committed staff, especially since we are unable to compete on salary, time off or other perks.

I just returned from the Town meeting in Memorial Lounge on 2/10/14. Here are some of my thoughts.

The question posed to the group seemed to say that you were asking what benefit (of the 3) people could do without. We have been told that there is no intention to change benefits, just the cost share formulas. All three of those benefits are important to our entire campus community. My idea of cost-share would include a conversation about UVM cutting back on the percentage paid for each of these benefits. I agree with Marie’s comment to the UBAC about getting some figures. I myself think health care is the most important. However, I did take advantage of the tuition remission for my son years back. It was the one reason I came to work at UVM.

How much money can UVM save:

- By reducing retirement contribution from 10% to 8%
- Paying 85% towards dependent tuition remission
- Slightly increasing employee percentage for health care. We are so very lucky to have UVM pay such a high portion of our medical and dental.
- I do not know of anyone in this state who has benefits as good as UVM.
I do think it is important for non-represented staff to receive the same benefits as those unionized groups.

What do other educational institutions in Vermont do? Maybe some comparisons would show how good we have it here.

I also think it is important for people at UVM to understand how dire our need is to save money in the future; that there is a deficit; UVM cannot sustain itself going forward status quo; that changes need to be made.

In my opinion, I would rather forgo a raise and have to pay a little more for benefits than see departments reduce their work force.

I am writing to voice my concerns about the proposed cost share changes. I have been a UVM employee for 31 years, and my son is about to become a student at UVM in the fall, with my 2nd child only 2 years behind. I joined the UVM campus with the intention that my children would attend UVM or one of the other available schools. To change that benefit that I have been promised for all of these years I feel would be an infringement of the employee/employer trust that I have appreciated. Additionally, I would like to point out that the UVM staff raises have been minimal in the last several years, and have not come close to keeping up with the cost of living. To change our benefits would put staff further behind the market. We work at UVM because of the great benefits, often times making less than we would in the corporate world. I would think that if UVM does decide to implement changes than it would be a reasonable approach to do so on a grandfathered basis, that way, new hires would know exactly what they were signing on for.

I also feel that any proposed retirement should be at a grandfathered succession as well. I have spent all of these years here at UVM, and I am expecting, and relying on my retirement for my future. While I am approaching my retirement in about 10 years, I think it would be unfair to change that security that I have trusted would be there for me.

I also would like to point out that the Union drive that has been unsuccessful to this point would likely receive a good deal more support, if our voices are not heard on these proposed changes.

I would also like to suggest that the tenure system be reviewed and revamped. I have seen far too many Faculty members receive tenure, and before long start showing up for brief appearances daily or weekly. Many, who no longer have funded projects, ride the system on departmental funds until they decide to retire. This uses valuable resources such as dollars, as well as lab and office space. This unfortunately is not a rarity, but I would suggest that it is happens departmental wide throughout the University.

One of the main reasons that I sought employment at UVM was because of excellent cost of benefits provided by the university. I had offers for other employment possibilities with much higher wages but chose UVM because of the cost of health care and the contributions UVM made toward retirement. Those are two of the reasons that people come to the university and stay committed to the university.

Since I have been at the University, my salary has not increased at a rate to keep up with the cost of living. I voted down the union last year because I felt that UVM would “take care of us” even if we weren’t unionized. I have talked with several other employees who are reconsidering the union because the unrepresented staff are usually the ones who end up hurting with situations like this. I have heard that we may not get an increase this year. To up the cost of
living, increase our donation percentage, etc. does not seem fair. Especially when top officials here make so much.

I hope someone will look out for us! Thank you.

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Is there any reason why staff was given such short notice of this important meeting (UBAC Town Hall)?

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It saddens me to think non-unionized staff will likely take another hit and our benefits will be negatively impacted.

My thoughts: Don't change my benefits unless they are going to be improved.
Charge those who make absurd salaries (the AD, Dan Fogel, etc.) more for the benefits they get. They can afford to pay more/get fewer benefits.

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I am writing to comment on the discussion currently taking place regarding a possible change in the cost share for dependent tuition remission.

1) I originally returned to UVM specifically for this benefit. It is a critical benefit for me, my family and my staff members. In addition, I often interview others for staff openings in our department and many of our qualified applicants apply specifically for that benefit. They do not apply for the salary levels being offered at UVM.

2) If this benefit is reduced, even slightly, there would be an inequity with the State College employees who currently enjoy full remission for their dependents. I don’t believe that it would be fair for a State College employee to received full tuition remission for their dependent at UVM while the UVM employees pay more.

3) We are often told that benefits are an integral part of our salary package. Reducing this benefit would be a reduction in our salary package and our salary increases over the past few years have been minimal or non-existent.

4) If a cost-share change takes place with a July 1, 2014 start date, many of us haven’t planned for additional tuition expenses for our dependents. I know this would be a hardship for many of my staff. Perhaps this should be grandfathered.

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My concern is that the budget shortfalls will come at the cost of unrepresented staff. since we have no separate contracts or bargaining units changes will be just dictated to us. Historically upper management has either had their own separate contracts that we are seldom privy too and in the past few years are raises have not even covered our health care increases and parking fees. I am told UVM could become self-insured and this would save money also reduce the vehicle fleet or at least buy vehicles with better gas mileage (there is no reason we need all the big vans for physical plant).

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I do understand that the University has to look to balance the budget somehow.

I am worried, naturally, about the dependent tuition remission benefit, as I have a son who is a freshman at the university this year. It is a little unfair to change the benefit, I feel, once he has committed to UVM. He might have been able to get a better financial package elsewhere
(depending on the results of the cost share plan), but he didn't explore other colleges, given the tuition remission benefit.
I think several items need to be reviewed carefully in fairness to all employees. They are as follows:

1. Tuition Remission – Some of us do not have children who will be attending UVM or plan on getting a degree and receive no credit or added compensation as a result. Currently, if someone does not take the UVM healthcare insurance because they are on their spouse’s elsewhere, they receive an adjustment in their salary. Such is not the case for those of us who do not use tuition remission. Perhaps those employees who have children attending UVM should pay a small percentage of this benefit. As healthcare cost keep going up, tuition remission seems to have remained stable.

2. Health Care – Currently there is a cap on employee % responsibility and those individuals earning thousands of dollars more pay the same percentage as the individual at highest percentage rate. As a result, I feel that employees earning less than $50,000 should not have to pay an increase in healthcare premiums and the burden should be shifted to those earning over $150,000.

3. Retirement plan – should remain as it is. Many of us have worked here for years and earning less money than in the private sector because of we would have these benefits.

Also, benefit packages for those in the top tier is exorbitant and downright ridiculous. I strongly objected to the benefits package that President Fogel received when he stepped down as president the same year that no one received a salary raise. Thank you for reviewing and considering my opinion.

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I truly enjoy working for the University of Vermont (15 years) and am very grateful to have a job, but I’m a bit concerned about the proposed Cost-Share Benefit idea. I am on the low-pay end of the spectrum, and know that if the cost-share benefit is approved and I am forced to pay more for benefits, it will very negatively impact my economic state of affairs (which aren't very good to begin with), as I'm certain will be the case in regard to my fellow peers.

I’m aware that UVM is highly supportive of Social Justice and Social Equality, therefore, in my opinion, to achieve social justice and social equality as it pertains to UVM Staff and Faculty in this instance, the top earners at UVM should pay for the increases that are necessary (to include the President of UVM), and I say this with complete sincerity and respect.

Thus far, UVM has had an amazing benefits package, and the majority felt this was to offset the reduced salaries we receive (based on national averages).

This also speaks to loyalty for perhaps some of the low income earners. When faced with the decision to form a union, the majority stuck by UVM administration, and I believe, mainly because most of us felt that UVM treats its employees well and has great benefits. I, for one, do not wish to be a union member; however, will we be forced to do so due to this benefits issue?

I don’t know what the outcome will be, but I ask that the administration looks kindly on the people who are just trying to make a living, day by day, barely getting by in this terrible economic situation in the U.S.A. With Respect, UVM Employee

February 6, 2014

In regards to the thought of UVM becoming its own insurer, I would prefer that this not happen and that we continue with BCBS. A primary reason for this is the fact that BCBS is accepted nationally, as well as internationally in many circumstances, which provides an extra level of security and access. I would prefer maintaining an insurance plan that would allow me to travel
easily without having to purchase additional coverage (and having to go through the extra steps associated with filing a claim through a travel insurance provider).

In regards to dependent tuition remission, a university that I worked at previously had a tuition remission scale that was based on an employee's salary. The lowest pay band received 100% remission, the next band received 90% remission, and so forth. Perhaps a similar scale could be implemented for dependent tuition remission at UVM? Even if it starts with something like employees in the lowest pay band receiving 90% remission for their dependents and then decreasing from there, I think it would still provide a substantial benefit for those who are sending their children to Vermont state schools (vs. private or out-of-state schools).

I understand the reasoning for examining these benefits. It just blows my mind that we can hire new people at exorbitant rates and many of them, without our feedback or input and now the administration is trying to be transparent and ask our opinion on this? Silly to think I even matter. I love my job and my workplace. I make less money here than in the open market because I choose to take advantage of the tuition remission benefit and the retirement benefit. I could pay a little more for health insurance, but the other benefits are too dear to take away or even to chip away at. Already retirement benefits I was promised when hired have been taken away in just the five years I have been back here. Please do not take away any more.

I have always said that UVM is a fantastic place to work and I have enjoyed my time here a great deal. One of the things I tell everyone I speak with about my job here at UVM is that it doesn’t pay well but has fantastic benefits. If you plan on increasing the cost of benefits to the employee, you will most certainly need to increase the pay band also. UVM does not pay individuals in my pay band enough to increase the cost of their benefits, bottom line. My title is an Office Support Generalist and I have been with UVM for 20 years (as of January 31, 2014) and I make:

Gross 38,041.58 Net 24,978.34

Not much as you can see. IF I were the primary income generator of my family there is NO way I could live off this income alone and raise a family. Start rate for my pay band typically is between 23,000 and 27,000. With the cost of housing, taxes, fuel, etc. in Vermont (one of the highest nation-wide) I could not rely on UVM as my only income. Again, one of the reasons I took this job here at UVM was because of the fantastic benefits UVM offers. You must look at the “whole” picture not just a quick snapshot.

Take a look at this website when you make this decision in combination with salaries here at UVM: http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/13poverty.cfm

February 5, 2014

This is going to seem like a very obvious statement, but as far as increased cost-sharing on my part is concerned, I really cannot afford to pay any more for healthcare than is already being deducted from my paycheck. Healthcare is the only benefit offered, of which I am able to avail myself, but I really cannot afford to pay any more for it than I already do.

In reviewing my paycheck since February 2010, following the increase which Extension administrative assistants received to level the field with campus administrative assistants, I am taking home only $11.64 per paycheck more today than I was in February of 2010. (And that is down $9.48/pay since January 1, 2014, when the ACA adjustment was made.) So, my annual
take-home pay is a mere $279.36 more now than it was four years ago. I am .80 FTE and, in August 2011, went from five six-hour days to four seven-and-a-half hour days, just to save the approximately $12.00/day it costs me to drive to and from work (I live approximately 30 miles from the Berlin Extension office) and this is subject to increase at any time, depending on the oil companies’ whims.

It seems that every time there has been a net increase at the start of the fiscal year, there has been some change that requires an almost corresponding net decrease (the federal payroll tax thing, increased healthcare, etc.) during the year. It's like two steps forward, one-and-three-quarters steps back.

I am certainly not complaining about the benefits that UVM pays, or the other benefits such as sick pay, vacation pay, winter break days, etc. They're wonderful, but in the almost seven years I have worked for UVM Extension, I have not been able to afford to buy into any retirement plan at all. Everyone says, "Oh, it's only 2%," but while 2% of my pay (approximately $17.00 per paycheck, bi-monthly) may not sound like a lot of money to some people, it is more than I can afford, since one net paycheck doesn't even cover the monthly mortgage payment, so each month there is nothing left over after paying the mortgage, property taxes, utilities, vehicle and house insurances, vehicle fuel and maintenance costs, groceries, and out-of-pocket medical expenses (co-pays and anything not covered by the plans). With all those fixed costs, there is no way I have anything at all left over to invest in retirement funds via UVM. I also have no children, so tuition remission is of absolutely no value to me whatsoever. There is certainly not enough left over to pay an increased percentage for healthcare.

While I realize that this is a complex issue that cannot be rectified to everyone's satisfaction, I can say, unequivocally, that an increased percentage of healthcare costs would definitely constitute a financial hardship in my household.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to voice our concerns.

I understand why the UBAC is looking at increases in what the employee contributes in ways to help reduce UVM's overall expenses. Everyone is paying more for medical and dental premiums. This is an overall trend throughout the country and even though we don't want our portions to increase, it is an area that does make sense. I also understand them looking at the 403b contributions. I wouldn't want to see that reduced, but knowing full well that UVM is very generous in this arena, and the opportunity does present itself for the university to save quite a bit here, I do understand why this percentage might be reduced. I hope they don't recommend cuts that are drastic though.

What bothers me the most of these three items is the tuition remission piece. On the grand scheme of things, the amount that is being expended annually has to be minimal compared to other benefits. As we have children going through college, the numbers will fluctuate annually and the percentage has to be relatively small of those using this benefit, compared to the entire population of faculty and staff. This is a benefit that people weigh heavily when accepting a position here. It is great to have and I would hate to see it reduced. I can't fathom that the overall expense as compared to all others is that great, nor would the university realize huge savings here.

For all of these issues, a thing to consider is a "grandfather" clause or a phased in approach. I know the university is looking to save what they can wherever they can get it. For the insurance premiums, if the percentage value changes, then you can't grandfather that in if that is adopted.
For the 403b and tuition remission groups, they can grandfather people based on length of service just like other corporations do.

For example, if you begin working here 1/1/15, the 403b percentage might be 5% lets say, and the tuition remission portion might be 65%. For those with less than 10 years of service, that might be 6% and 75% for example. For those with 10 or more years of service, maybe something like 7% for your 403b, but will hold the tuition remission at 100% as it is today. If some kind of grandfathering was instituted, the university would still save money over time and getting the employees to swallow these pills might be a little more palatable.

If the staff council rep pulling this information together and for the staff council person testifying on our behalf to the UBAC, if that individual(s) want to discuss this, I would be more than willing to take some time to chat.

I want to THANK staff council for once again being our voice to the UBAC on our behalf.

First, I want to be sure that ANY change to ANY benefit will affect BOTH faculty & staff.

Health Care Costs Benefit: With the rising cost of health care, I understand and agree that changes in the health care costs will have to change and it will affect the whole university staff and faculty.

Retirement Benefit: I like the idea of a match system for UVM for the retirement contribution. Would hate to see the 10% taken away entirely, perhaps we can change to a match system. Again, however, please do keep in mind that we do “sell” this to new employees as an amazing benefit, therefore, being able to justify paying them below market value because most people look at the 10% contribution to your retirement plan as part of your “overall salary”. And, again, that this change will affect the whole university staff and faculty.

Tuition Remission: When it comes to Tuition Remission, I have a voice regarding this. I am personally affected by any change to the Dependent Tuition Remission benefit (and I hope that those who do “not” have dependents who will be (or perhaps have already used this benefit at UVM) support keeping this benefit for the University. This does *not* affect the whole university staff and faculty; only those with dependents attending college now or will be attending college someday. So, I do feel this is unfair to change this benefit because it doesn’t affect the whole university staff and faculty! Because this affects me, it would be easy to say that those dependents already attending college should be grandfathered; however, that is not the way I roll. Those employees with longevity here at the University have afforded their dependents opportunities that may be taken away from the next generation of dependents coming through UVM.

It was one of the main reasons I applied to and accepted a position at UVM. I know we often-times cannot meet candidate salary requirements, but we stress to them the exceptional benefits that UVM provides to our employees and one, BIG selling point, is the Tuition Remission for dependents. I do think the Dependent Tuition Remission benefit plays upon Our Common Ground at UVM also and I know when I speak of this benefit to those outside the UVM community one of the first reactions I receive is not how lucky am I, but that it affords my children an opportunity at a high-level education and be able to make something of their lives and how doors can open for them because of a quality education and the opportunity to come out of college with “reasonable” college loans to pay back (because of their parents’ commitment to UVM)! We are providing an opportunity to our children to better themselves and attend college (because truth is, going to college IS expensive and there would be some students who would get left behind because of financial strains). We want to build a better
society for our children and in some cases afford them an education that some of us were not able to receive due to financial constraints. It would be a *shame* to take this opportunity and benefit away from your employees!!!

I also want to make sure that the financial side of changing Dependent Tuition Remission is fully evaluated...it is hard to know how this will affect our campus until we have an understanding as to what the thinking process is for changing the dependent tuition remission.

But, if it should go away, let me throw some scenarios out to you: Keep in mind our salaries are often-times below market value. Keep in mind the burden on the staff to pay for college for their dependents and the very real possibility that many dependents would not be afforded an opportunity to go to college because of financial constraints.

1) No Change to Dependent Tuition Remission: We hire an office program support generalist for $32,000 and this employee works 20 years at UVM and puts two children through college under the Dependent Tuition Remission benefit and we will factor a 2% cost of living increase each year. Cost to the University: estimated (8 years of education at $15,000 = 120,000), salary at 2% increases each year = $777,516 = total 20-year compensation paid by $897,516.

   Result: The employee has money to live on at $32,000 and their children are coming out of school with lower loans to pay back for “other costs” besides tuition (estimated at $10,000/year, room and board) for a total of $80,000 that either the student or parent are going to have to pay (making college affordable).

2) Change to Tuition Remission – for employee to pay 50%: We hire an office program support generalists for $37,000, again a 20 year employee, putting two children through college. Compensation over 20 years at 2% increase each year = 899,003; cost of 8 years of college UVM’s 50% portion = $60,000 (and $60,000 paid by student/parents, plus $80,000 for room & board (at $10,000/year)). Total compensation paid by University over 20 year period: $959,003

   Result: The employee has money to live on at $36,000 and their children are coming out of school with loans to pay back for “other costs” (estimated at $10,000/year, room and board $80,000) and 1/2 tuition ($60,000) for a total of $140,000 that either the student or parent are going to have to pay (this would be an expensive loan repayment schedule).

3) No Dependent Tuition Remission: We hire an office program support generalists at $42,000/year as fair market value, factoring in 2% cost of living each year. Total compensation paid over 20 years is $1,020,490.

   Result: The employee has money to live on at $42,000 and their children are coming out of school with loans to pay back for tuition (estimated at $15,000/year) equaling $120,000 and “other costs” (estimated $10,000/year, room and board $80,000) equaling $80,000 for a total of $200,000 that either the student or parent are going to have to pay. This would cause either a burden of the child not being able to attend college at all or in the alternative, very high student and parent loans to pay back.

4) Sliding scale for Dependent Tuition Remission (such as is the case now for cost share of health benefits and parking): I would want to see the sliding scale percentages before I have an opinion on this.

   However, I do want to point out that in the College of Medicine, many of the faculty (not all) are paid only a portion of their salaries on the UVM side (on average $30,000) and the remainder of their salaries are picked up by FAHC (for a lot more $ than the staff make here
at UVM)...so, if they are picking up their health care benefits/parking on the UVM side of the house, they are actually paying less for these benefits than probably 90% of the staff here at the University. The same would be true of the Dependent Tuition Remission if it changes to a sliding scale. Is there a way to confirm this – because I am not sure if there is a different arrangement for COM faculty? But, *if* this is the case, it is already terribly not fair – and it would be the same if there was a sliding scale for the Dependent Tuition Remission!

With regards to Tuition Remission, could this please be grandfathered? I have turned down many jobs throughout the years because of this benefit. My children are only now of college age. Thank you.

I have worked at UVM for over 25 years (with a short break due to a move). During that time I have been amazed and astounded at the wording used by seemingly intelligent people who are being charged with review of cost sharing formulas and employee benefits. To state in writing that cost sharing formulas might be changed, but the benefits will not is a blatant disrespect to the intellect of the UVM staff who would be affected by this “so-called” 2% change to cost-sharing contributions in their paycheck. We are not stupid and can run our own formulas for any “tax saving” benefits outweighing the changes to our cost sharing contributions which has been mentioned in these delineations. For those of us who work very hard in our positions to manage critical gears in the working of UVM and make under the $50,000 after 25 years of service, we will have to make up the 2% by taking it out of our retirement contributions or by trying to manage our household budgets to accommodate this change. And never mind any consideration of a pay increase of 2% because each year it is taken away by readjusting our benefits or by cost of living to make up the budgetary shortfalls of an administration that has not managed debt successfully. Since our retirement healthcare package has already been minimized and the income that we receive would not support a comfortable living environment, changes to our cost-sharing benefit in any amount most definitely impacts on our present benefits.

For those at UVM who make over the $100,000 mark, this “across-the-board” increase in our cost-sharing would have minimal impact to life style. Yet, we continue to offer outrageous monetary incentives and package “deals” to new employees in that over $100,000 and then take away from the dedicated staff that just make ends meet. In no way, would “benefits remain the same.”

February 4, 2014

Thank you very much for this. This is very helpful. Do you have any more information on what is being considered? I’ve gone through all the website links Gary provided, and find nothing. It is pretty difficult to provide feedback on something when there are no proposals about what the possible options might be.

I want to provide my feedback on the cost share formula change that I know nothing about. I don’t have time to pay attention to the politics at work, I am focused on my responsibilities and I don’t pursue information about work at home, so I'm at a loss. I did read the Staffline and have superficial knowledge of what the President wants to do and my feedback is probably based more on emotional response rather than thought out retort, but here it is:
I left an established job to come work for UVM, as I couldn’t afford a bunch of loans and I had three kids to get through college. I rationalized the decrease in salary by adding the cost of tuition to my salary. If you increase the amount I must pay, I pay comprehensive fees plus room & board then I will need a second job...it defeats my purpose of working here.

When Dan Fogel gets such a golden parachute (in my opinion, poor stewardship of public funds) and I get 2% every single year, tuition remission for my kids makes it easier to show up for work and consider my employer with honor.

Medical costs are expensive, I’d probably qualify for public assistance with my salary, so whatever they do I’ll probably be okay.

Those of us who make less than $50k should not be expected or asked to pay a higher amount than those making more, sliding scale!

The University needs to consider balancing it’s books off the backs of highly paid administrators rather than the much lesser paid staff.

I am concerned that if these changes do not reflect fairness then the next union vote will get them locked in.

Finally, I honestly think I’ll see if it’s cost effective for me to pay more tuition for less pay or go back to my old job. Remission of tuition is the benefit that most of us are here for, because it balances the lack of adequate pay!!

Thanks for advocating on my/our behalf, I hope this helps.

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First of all, thank you so much for your work in representing UVM staff. I just began employment with UVM, taking a huge pay cut ($12,000) even though I have been working in the same field for nearly 18 years. The only way it is feasible for me to work at UVM and meet my financial responsibilities is that the amount I need to pay for benefits is reasonable, and that tuition remission for dependents is an employee benefit. I doubt that this is additional information, but wanted to add my voice to the discussion in at least this limited way.

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I have worked at the University of Vermont for 23 years. My job is low paying but I have stayed so that my children would have the benefit of tuition remission. I have been told for years that the pay is low at the University but the benefits are great. I do agree. I do feel though that employees who have worked for a number of years deserve to be grandfathered to certain changes to tuition remission. I do understand the need for change but I think that years of service should be considered. I have another child starting college in four years. I believe I have worked a long time to earn that benefit.

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I see that there are meetings in Burlington during work hours, I will not be able to make these. Can there be an online option, such as blackboard, webinar...? I cannot find any info on what they are proposing for “changing the way that the COST of benefits is shared” - what is being proposed specifically? What ideas are they looking for from employees?

Any help appreciated.

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I say that if the Cost Share Formulas for Benefits are impacted between both Faculty & Staff, that it should be by what your annual salary is, which is what parking is based on. Faculty
salaries are way more than most staff and then there are staff that are making a ton of money and I say it should factor in what ones salary is!

Many feelings and things to say about this subject for all of us. I ask only that the university keep the following in mind as a matter of fairness to all staff:

- Consider modeling changes as we have with the health care benefit by making changes to incoming/new hire staff first
- Create a graduated scale for benefits based on longevity/years of service (i.e. 5 year, 10 year, and 15 year benefit levels)
- Look at menu plan of services for people to choose up to a predetermined dollar value (i.e. if retirement is more valuable to someone they can place more benefit there vs tuition remission)
- Do not let tuition remission be unlimited for staff. Why should the university pay for someone to have 2 or 3 degrees? This is especially true because too many of these individuals today are in non-critical roles at the university
- Make a firm stand with unions that benefits should be identical for all UVM staff. This should also include executives
- Don't make all of the contribution changes in a single year. Spread them out over a few years

I am coming up on my 10th year of service at UVM with my oldest child entering college the fall of 2015. To be denied any tuition remission at this point would be hurtful to my family. Many of us are in this situation or currently have a child attending college. This, along with a good health care and the retirement plan are drivers for taking jobs at the university. This is especially true since wages are sub-par and have not kept up with the cost of living in this community.

Seniority has been important to the university in decision making until now and should not be lost in this discussion due to a financial issue that has been years in the making and not properly addressed by management until now.

I would welcome a discussion on any of these topics. Thank you for hearing these concerns.

Reasons: I am concerned about the issue pertaining to President Sullivan and Provost Rosowsky having the University Benefits Advisory Council (UBAC) review the cost share formulas for the following UVM employee benefits: Healthcare Coverage, Dependent Tuition Remission, Retirement Savings Plan.

UVM staff are really not up to the standard when it comes to wages when you look at the grand scheme of other jobs with the same responsibilities, although a lot of us stay here because we feel the benefits help make up for making a lesser wage than the norm. If our benefits start taking cuts, this will cause some concern to many staff members who are here because of the healthcare, tuition remission for dependents, and retirement plan. I understand UVM is trying to cut costs, although I feel they could look elsewhere to cut their costs. UVM has tuition increases which I would think would help with some of the University's overall costs.

It is my opinion that if the University starts to cut benefits and increase our costs as employees to these benefits that they may lose a lot of valuable staff members. Perhaps their plan is to do this little by little, but if continued over time I believe the University could lose a lot of valuable
staff members, as stated in my previous comment, there isn’t a lot of competition with wages at UVM when you look at the overall job market.