



# *The University of Vermont*

## *Staff Council Office*

*Serving as a voice and advocate for all staff at UVM, since 1971.*

March 18, 2011

To: Daniel M. Fogel, President  
Jane Knodell, Provost

From: Ida Russin, Staff Council President *Ida M. Russin*  
Michelle Smith, Staff Council Vice President *Michelle M. Smith*

Re: Response to Recent Events and Announcements

On behalf of the UVM Staff and UVM Staff Council, we are writing to you today to comment on several recent decisions and communications of the Administration which have raised concerns among all staff employees, but especially those non-represented staff on whose behalf the Staff Council advocates. The intent of our letter is to highlight general sentiments of staff that have been expressed to the Staff Council on individual issues, and provide feedback on how these have been viewed and interpreted.

### FY 2012 Budget Proposal:

On Thursday, March 11, 2011, members of the Staff Council Salary & Budget Committee and Executive Board attended a meeting organized by Provost Knodell and Vice President Cate to discuss the FY 2012 Budget. At that time several options were provided as potential ways to close budget gaps. This meeting was framed as a discussion and the Staff Council made no formal endorsement of any scenarios. Some strategic decisions outlined in the [March 15, 2011 FY 2012 Budget Update](#) communication were discussed at this meeting, but again only as possible scenarios. The date when the final communication to the larger UVM community would be delivered was not discussed, nor was the [Staff Council's Salary Raise Pool Recommendation](#), which was disappointing for some staff who had created the proposal.

Of all of the strategies the Administration outlined in the communication to close the budget gap, the strategic decision of a 0% salary increase has caused the most confusion for staff, as it was unclear as to whether all employees meant non-represented staff, or actually represented and non-represented faculty and staff. The follow up [FY 2012 Budget Update - Clarification](#) delivered on March 17, 2011 now leaves non-represented staff with the perspective that the need for budget cuts are being disproportionately placed on them, while collective bargaining negotiations will continue. It is difficult for the non-represented staff to believe that these negotiations will not result in some kind of an increase for represented employees - faculty and staff.

### Market Mixed Messages:

It is also difficult for some staff to understand the decision making process regarding the 0% salary increase when some indicators suggest that UVM is in better financial standing currently than it was during the most challenging days of the recession. During that time period, staff who made \$75,000 or less received 2% salary increases. If no increase in salaries is provided in the budget, staff who make

more than \$75,001 a year will go a third year without a pay increase; we feel this decision is unfortunate and will lead to a group of employees feeling devalued.

School of Business and Administration Dean and Partner:

Additionally, it is difficult for staff to reconcile being told the University has a budget gap that needs to be closed when the salary for the newly appointed Dean of the School of Business and Administration and his wife are high in comparison to most UVM employee salaries, and no context for how these salaries will be funded has been offered. While Staff Council recognizes that it is necessary to recruit the best and brightest to lead and improve the quality and scope of UVM's educational opportunities, and that difficult decisions need to be made in the best interest of the University as a whole, the rapid-fire timing of the announcements regarding all of these significant decisions has promoted cognitive dissonance, and in some cases angered many staff.

Post Retirement Medical Benefits:

Staff Council has appreciated the open and transparent process as changes to the Post Retirement Medical Benefits (PRMB) have been reviewed. Administrators have kept us advised and included every step of the way. However, the timing of the [Post-Retirement Medical Benefits Notice of Plan Change](#) communication on Wednesday, March 16, 2011 outlining the final changes to post-65 benefits came on the heels of other significant news around the FY 2012 Budget. The PRMB announcement has further contributed to an environment of decreased morale. While there is never a "good" time for potential "bad" news, change requires an adjustment period, and when a series of personal adjustments need to be made in quick succession, morale can easily run low.

March 7, 2011 Snowstorm Closing:

The University's closing on Monday, March 7, 2011 as a result of a major snowstorm and the way communications were distributed left many staff feeling as though their safety was not respected. Staff Council has received numerous messages about this incident, and subsequent problems that developed due to the delayed opening on March 8<sup>th</sup>. While Staff Council understands that the current "Emergency Management" policy and procedures are being reviewed and strengthened, the poor delivery of communication on March 7<sup>th</sup> led many staff to believe that the delayed communication occurred because most faculty and students were not on campus due to spring break. The event did, however, highlight the need for further education regarding the CatAlert system and how all members of the UVM Community should update their emergency contact information to ensure the best communication methods for their needs. The Staff Council would be pleased to continue to advocate for staff to improve systems and check their CatAlert contact information.

Administrative Business Service Center:

It is Staff Council's understanding that the recent creation of the Administrative Business Service Center (ABSC) occurred as a cost saving measure to provide better financial oversight and efficiency. However, many staff are not aware of how this entity has been funded, and therefore view its creation as another contrary action which is potentially adversely impacting the University budget. Staff concerns could be alleviated somewhat if the Administration were willing to provide more information regarding how the ABSC is funded, its projected impact on the University budget, and displacement/substitution of current staff positions.

Student Success and Satisfaction:

The recent [Student Success and Satisfaction Study](#), focusing on retention and academics, also neglected to address the important role staff plays in the experience of a UVM student. This too was seen as another indication by staff that they are not always highly valued employees. Staff Council believes that the Administration is aware of the positive impact that staff have on the learning environment of our students, but feel that we need to continue to encourage the Administration to express their appreciation of the staff's contributions to the student body.

Summary:

Staff Council is dedicated to working with the Administration to address the concerns of all staff on these issues and more. Our mission clearly outlines our role to seek out and respond to the ideas and concerns of staff and to represent them to the Administration while keeping Staff informed of University initiatives. We remain true to this mission and will continue to be the voice of all non-represented staff.

Cc: Richard Cate, Vice President for Finance and Administration  
Gary Derr, Vice President for Executive Operations and Chief of Staff  
Barbara Johnson, Associate Vice President of Human Resource Services