To: Transdisciplinary Research Initiative Advisory Committee (TRIAC)  
Faculty Senate Executive Committee  

From: Jane Knodell, Provost  

Subject: TRI Spires of Excellence - Director Appointments  

As the Spires of Excellence have developed, we have built an administrative structure to support them (establishing base budgets, providing continuing administrative support, identifying physical space, etc.). Over the past several months, Vice President Dom Grasso and I have become increasingly aware of the administrative demands associated with leading the Spire Steering Committees as they enter their third year. We believe that all of the Spires are at a point in their development where more formal recognition of their leadership is necessary. For this reason, we have moved forward with Director appointments for each of the Spires.

The Complex Systems Spire has essentially had a Director insofar as Professor Peter Dodds has served as both Director of the Complex Systems Center since June 2011 and Chair of the Spire Steering Committee since 2010. Working closely with Associate Directors Josh Bongard (Vice Chair) and Chris Danforth as well as colleagues across campus, Dodds is dedicated to growing transdisciplinary, systems-focused teaching and research at UVM. This includes core courses in Complex Systems and Networks; the Complex Systems graduate certificate; a visiting speaker series; bi-weekly reading groups; and innovative “TEDxUVM” events around Big Data.

Dean Doug Lantagne has been appointed Director of the Food Systems Spire of Excellence. Doug is particularly well-placed to continue the Spire’s advance. As Dean of UVM Extension, he is close to the work being done on the ground (so to speak) to create a more sustainable food system in our region. He is well connected to our colleagues in state government and to other entities working in the Food Systems arena in Vermont. Internally, as a Dean he can help forge stronger connections between the Food Systems Spire and the colleges and schools.

Professor Rae Nishi has been appointed Director of the Neuroscience, Behavior and Health Spire. Professor Nishi was instrumental in the development of the original and successful NBH Spire proposal in academic year 2009-10, and has served as the Spire Steering Committee’s Chair in both 2010-11 and 2011-12. Under Professor Nishi’s leadership, the NBH Spire has been
extremely active in outreach, in identifying promising areas of focus, in building faculty collaborations, in the submission of major grant proposals, and in the recruitment of the first Spire-driven faculty member on campus.

I know all three Directors will continue to work closely with, and rely heavily on, the expertise and efforts of full Steering Committee membership.

cc: Professor Peter Dodds
    Vice President Domenico Grasso
    Dean Doug Lantagne
    Professor Rae Nishi