EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Vermont is in an ideal position to develop a Policy Studies Transdisciplinary Research Initiative (PSTRI). Building upon existing and local resources, we can build a nationally competitive research program whose hallmark is the utilization of diverse methodological and theoretical frameworks to examine complex public policy problems facing Vermont, the nation and the globe. A PSTRI would have two specific features: 1) A research program connected to the James M. Jeffords Center and 2) A transdisciplinary public policy Ph.D. program. Our integrative approach offers an opportunity to develop a world-class niche emphasizing a wide range of methodologies, and incorporating the three policy domains of environmental governance, health, and social policy. In these domains, UVM is, or has the potential to be, known as a leader on the national and global stage.

PROPOSED TRANSDISCIPLINARY SPIRE OF EXCELLENCE IN POLICY STUDIES

The University of Vermont (UVM) is in an ideal position to develop prominence in the field of Public Policy Studies. Building upon existing and local resources, we can create a nationally competitive program whose hallmark is methodological pluralism, by which we mean the use of multiple research methodologies to examine complex public policy problems (Sneddon, Howarth, & Norgaard 2006). After evaluating extramural funding and publications of UVM faculty, we determined that a PSTRI should build upon existing UVM strengths in three domains: environmental governance, health (with a preliminary emphasis in gerontology-geriatrics), and social policy (with an emphasis on social justice).

Each domain will work on “critical, emergent issues.” Environmental governance is crucial if we are to solve the great environmental challenges of climate change, deforestation, species loss, etc. Solutions to these problems will require widespread behavioral and political changes on a global scale. Health policy for an aging population will be a defining issue for the
U.S. and the world in the 21st Century, especially given that ever-rising health costs are unsustainable. Social policies that narrow the gaps between the “haves” and “have-nots” within the United States and among developed and developing nations will be critical for creating peace and stabilizing the global economy. A PSTRI offers an opportunity to support economic development in Vermont and the nation by helping to address pressing issues including discrimination, social inequity, aging populations, and environmental degradation.

We envision a comprehensive program that offers opportunities for transdisciplinary graduate and undergraduate teaching, research, and scholarly collaboration, and that cuts across theoretical and methodological divides. At the nexus would be the James M. Jeffords Center, whose mission is to “bring together interdisciplinary programs and scholars, … [to] collaborate with academic leaders, administrators, students, and policy makers … to support the development of effective solutions to policy challenges which are increasingly complex and multidimensional.”

**Elements of PSTRI.** The spire would build upon the newly founded Jeffords Center, at which faculty can connect and collaborate on research opportunities and policy problems—including but not exclusively those that are eligible for external support through federal, state, and international grants, private funding sources, and contract research for national, state and local agencies. The PSTRI would also include a transdisciplinary Ph.D. program in integrated policy studies designed around a “hub and spoke” model, with environmental governance, health, and social policy serving as the initial spokes. The program would train students who already hold Master’s-level degrees in Public Policy or related fields for academic or research careers in universities, government, private think tanks, or the nonprofit sector. *It would be the first Ph.D. program at UVM with a strong social-science base, filling a void in our portfolio of doctoral programs and positioning our faculty to secure increased extramural research funding.*
Students in the Ph.D. program will be trained in a unique curriculum operating along three axes: 1) Disciplinary & Theoretical Foundations; 2) Pluralist Methodological Expertise; and 3) Policy Problem Domains (see figure 1). Through a set of interdisciplinary core courses, which would employ “governance” as an organizing framework, students would develop a solid understanding of the economic, political, and sociological foundations of public policy research.¹ Three key components distinguish the program: solid grounding in multiple methodological approaches ranging from the quantitative to the qualitative, from complex systems to interpretive/textual analyses; 2) integration of the three policy domains into every theoretical and methodological core course; and 3) the potential for a joint degree program with the Vermont Law School, which boasts one of the preeminent programs in environmental law in the nation.

Rather than relying on a limited set of methods as many public policy programs do, our program would teach students to allow specific problems and research questions to guide them in their choice of methodology—or in their use of multiple methods. From this foundational core,
students would specialize in specific policy domains (i.e. environmental governance, health, and social policy), but would also gain knowledge about other policy-related domains in which UVM has strengths (See Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Domains</th>
<th>Disciplinary &amp; Interdisciplinary Approaches to Governance</th>
<th>Methodological Emphasis</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disciplines/Fields (alpha-order)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Agriculture, Business, Administration, Community, Development, Ecology &amp; Natural Resources, Economics, Educational Leadership, Engineering, Geography, History, Life Sciences, Medicine, Nursing, Political Science, Public administration, Psychology, Social Work, Sociology, &amp; Special Education</td>
<td>Critical theory, Feminist theory, Game theory, Institutional theory, Neo-classical Economic theory, Rational choice theory, Social capital theory, Social justice theory, Complex systems theory, Advanced statistical methods (including econometrics), Complex systems modeling, GIS/Mapping, Informatics, Interpretive/textual/cultural analysis, Participatory research, Program evaluation, Social Network Analysis, Qualitative methodology</td>
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Undergraduates would benefit from this spire through research opportunities; coursework in a potential policy studies minor; and the addition of new faculty on campus who have reputations for ground-breaking research and share the public service teaching mission of UVM.

**Opportunity for National Prominence.** This program will gain national prominence through its unique combination of methodological pluralism and emphasis on the discrete areas of environmental governance, health/gerontology, and social policy/social justice.

We define the first domain, *environmental governance*, as “[m]ulti-level interactions (i.e., local, national,…global) among, but not limited to, three main actors, i.e., state, market, and civil society, which interact with one another, whether in formal or informal ways; in formulating and implementing policies in response to environment-related demands and inputs from the society…for the purpose of attaining environmentally-sustainable development” (Florano, 2008).
We view this broadly, including traditional concerns about climate change and international governance regimes and emerging, “second-generation” foci (Durant, O’Leary, & Fiorino, 2004) on civic environmentalism; environmental justice; partnerships and networks; conflict resolution; the integration of environmental governance within other policy domains (including food systems, health care delivery, education, and transportation), and on the use of scientific data to drive environmental policy. We also note that although there is a proliferation of new governance issues ranging from international climate change negotiations, to local community-based institutions (Ostrom, 1990), to green labeling, all involving a wide array of social actors. Little is known about what is really effective or what types of governance institutions are suited to what types of problems, and how they can combine into an effective global system of governance. Drawing on existing faculty and resources, we believe that UVM could be nationally competitive in this arena within a relatively short period of time.

For our health domain, we envision an initial emphasis on gerontology and geriatrics. The aging population of the industrialized world will have a significant impact on health-care systems, and labor, and will strain social security systems, change the accumulation of aggregate wealth and skew its intergenerational distribution, while imposing a growing burden on family support by the young (Borsch-Supan & Chiappori, 1991; Kemper, 2003; Satin, 1994; Skinner, 2001). We believe that we have the potential to offer a set of unique answers to questions about how states and countries can develop effective policies to respond to these problems. Relying on four major concentrated areas of effort at UVM—the Bishop Robert F. Joyce Distinguished University Professorship of Gerontology; the Gerontology Unit, Department of Medicine; Center for the Study of Aging; Certificate in Gerontology; and AHEC: 2010 Vermont AHEC Geriatrics Conference—we believe that our program can develop a niche in this area that would distinguish it from other graduate programs and research centers in public policy.
Our third domain, social policy and social justice, will strongly support the commitment of UVM to recruiting and retaining talented students and faculty from diverse backgrounds, with expertise in the study of diverse communities. It will allow faculty and students to participate in critical debates at the state and national levels that are too often sidelined in the academic study of public policy. By “social policy,” we mean domestic policies within the United States, other modern welfare states, and in developing nations (Bulmer, Lewis, & Piachaud, 1989). By “social justice,” we mean the study of inequality and political change, and of interactions among traditional policy-making elites with policy actors in the so-called “third sector” (i.e., advocates, activists, and organized social movements) (Atkinson, 1983; Craig, Burchardt, & Gordon, 2008).

Social Justice is a less common watchword of formal public policy analysis than social policy, although some leading national programs have established strengths in this area: the Sanford Institute at Duke, for example, is committed to scholarship on race and civil rights, while the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota has just named new leadership for its Center on Women and Public Policy (the first of its kind in the nation and still a rarity). The addition of social justice will distinguish our program from others that specialize in social policy alone, such as the Heller School at Brandeis. This domain will be particularly concerned with policy about women, communities of color, sexual minorities, children and adults living in poverty, and individuals with disabilities (Berkowitz, 1987; Gordon, 1990; O’Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999; Stone, 1984; 2002). Faculty with expertise in this area will be drawn primarily from the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and the College of Education and Social Services (CESS), but span all colleges at UVM. A social science perspective is particularly important in addressing these issues. Since the 1966 Coleman Report, for example, we have known that children living in poverty do not perform as well in school as others (Coleman, 1994) and are more likely to drop out and be linked to crime, drug use, delinquency, and future incarceration (Neckerman, 2004).
How states and nations work together, and how human service agencies, and health and education organizations collaborate to address these inequities have significant economic implications. By emphasizing the interplay between social justice and social policy, the UVM program would be distinctive, while establishing itself in an arena that other leading programs have also recognized as of critical importance.

**Relevance to Critical Issues in 21st Century Society.** Policy research includes a myriad of actors, time spans, programs and tools simultaneously at work within and across policy domains and arenas (Sabatier, 2007). Although contemporary methods of policy analysis often rely nearly exclusively on quantitative data and analysis, relevant methods also include qualitative, interpretive and non-linear modeling techniques. Although some research universities have chosen to specialize in a limited number of these methods, in this program research questions themselves will determine which methods are most appropriate, an approach that will become more and more important in the future of policy research.

To play a significant role in policy debates, UVM needs to be truly “transdisciplinary,” allowing for boundary-spanning within the social sciences (sociology, political science, social psychology, economics, public administration, community development, educational leadership, business administration, social work, etc.), and between these areas and other disciplines. The need for such collaborative policy research has been widely noted in the strategic plans of the National Science Foundation (NSF, 2006), has been embedded within the long-term plans of national governments (Townsend & Kunimoto, 2009), and promoted in descriptions of federal investments in performance management and measurement systems (Moynihan, 2008). Groundbreaking policy analyses will hinge on the capacity of the field to incorporate a wide body of methods, theories and domains that scholars can bring to bear on complex problems.
Further, a PSTRI is consonant with what economic development scholars have referred to as the “management of policy interdependencies”; that is, an examination of policies connected with the broader cultural, economic, political, and educational issues within a region to link strategically to the specific strengths of the state or local economy. For example, the aging population in Vermont (and nationally) will have enormous implications for social services, generating questions as to how we can best invest in education and training to improve the skills, knowledge, and flexibility of the workforce. As the literature correctly points out, how we address issues of social equity will also be a critical part of this discussion. Finally, scholarship on environmental governance explores the efficacy of various strategies in investing in natural resources in ways that can influence sustainable economic growth.

**UVM/VT Competitive Edge Potential for Resources.** The depth and strength of the three policy domains, and our position in Vermont, will make public policy research and a Ph.D. program very competitive in the marketplace for public and private resources in both contract research and basic science. Given UVM’s position as the sole research university in the state and its transdisciplinary focus, it will be uniquely situated to win evaluation contracts from federal, state, and local government agencies as well as private nonprofits. Resources for basic research will be facilitated by: 1) aggressive support for the fund-raising mission and a dedicated staff at our public policy center; and 2) our carefully selected issue areas, in which UVM can truly excel.

**Improved outcomes.** The Jeffords Center as a hub for the policy research and Ph.D. program would help establish UVM’s first cross-disciplinary doctoral program in the social sciences. This would enhance the research and public service missions of the university by supporting existing scholarship, and would dramatically improve opportunities to develop new projects and expand collaborations and funded research. Students would be trained in a unique, integrated, approach to the study of public policy, gaining critical skills for academic research
and practical policy analysis as well as an understanding of contemporary problems in their robust context. This would enhance the resources available to decision makers locally, regionally, and nationally. Indeed, the policy program would become a regular partner in the formulation of ideas for legislators and government agencies, and a routine part of the process of evaluating existing policies. Finally, the program could help address some of our most pressing policy challenges, including reducing poverty and hunger locally, nationally, and globally; improving longevity and the quality of life for an aging population; increasing the social resources available to address injustices based on gender and sexuality, race, class, and education; and reversing the slide toward environmental degradation.

**JUSTIFICATION FOR A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT**

After conducting a careful analysis of existing faculty strengths, we concluded that UVM has a critical mass of faculty publishing internationally-recognized work in the field of “environmental governance,” including at least five full professors, nine associate professors, and five assistant professors with active research and scholarship agendas in this area. The Gund Institute, the Center for Rural Studies (CRS), the Transportation Research Center, and faculty from the Rubenstein School of the Environment and Natural Resources (RSEN), the College of Agriculture and Life Science (CALS), CAS, CESS, College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (CEMS), and College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CNHS) all support active research agendas in this area as well. The UVM environmental programs have a strong national reputation. BSAD, CAS, CESS, the College of Medicine, and CNHS all have senior faculty actively engaged in gerontological-geriatric research, including transdisciplinary research teams. This includes the active participation of Stephen J. Cutler, recently retired and nationally renowned Bishop Joyce Distinguished University Professor of Gerontology and past president of the Gerontological Society of America. The social policy domain has a critical mass of diverse
faculty working within this area. The Women’s and Gender Studies Program alone has over 70 affiliates working on various aspects of gender and sexuality studies, with representation from at least four UVM colleges, as well as strong allies at the Vermont Law School and St. Michael’s College. Research teams within the domain are studying: Race/Class/Gender within the prison system (in collaboration with the Vermont Department of Corrections, Vermont Works for Women, the Children’s Aid Society, and the Vermont Commission on the Status of Women); the politics of civil unions and same-sex marriage in New England (through a collaboration with Vermont Law School); and race, gender, and work. The Center on Disability and Community Inclusion (CDCI), a centers for excellence in developmental disability, funded for 30 years through federal and state sources, serves as a resource on issues related to developmental disabilities and offers an array of programs and research projects including family support, inclusive education, and the Vermont Homeless Children and Youth Project. The Vermont Research Partnership supports a wide array of research initiatives designed to improve the well-being of children, families and individuals via a collaboration among UVM, the Vermont Agency for Human Services, the Vermont Child Health Improvement Program, CESS, UVM Extension, and the CRS. We have dozens of faculty with specialties in race relations, and particular depth in the study of social class.

**Existing Resources for PSTRI.** 1) Current UVM faculty, including at least 70 of whom have submitted CVs for the review of our working group, have wide-ranging fields of policy expertise and a willingness to work across traditional disciplinary boundaries; 2) All three of the transdisciplinary policy domains we have chosen to focus on, environmental governance, health, and social policy, have nationally recognized faculty; 3) The third domain, social policy, has not been highlighted at UVM to the same degree as environment or health, but it has significant faculty strength, interest, and diversity; 4) The Jeffords Center, the mission of which is to support
high-quality, transdisciplinary policy research; 5) Vermont, a small state that values governance grounded in multi-stakeholder partnerships and serves as an ideal laboratory for creating model policy initiatives; and 6) doctoral programs in the RSENR, CESS, and CAS, and Master’s programs in CALS, CEMS, CESS, RSENR. The numerous course offerings in these programs across the university could support a doctorate in public policy studies.

**Grants:** In 2009 UVM received 59 grants on environmental topics totaling $17.9 million, 76 grants in health related fields totaling $27.3 million and $12.5 million (77 grants) in areas related to issues of social policy.

**Facilities:** The Jeffords Center will provide the intellectual environment and technical support needed to generate research proposals and contracts that will fund policy research and graduate study. As they become established, these projects will provide the overhead to expand work areas and increase the number of offices and infrastructure needed for the program.

**Graduate Students:** UVM currently offers policy-related Master’s degrees in: Public Administration; Social Work; Education; Business Administration; Community Development & Applied Economics; Natural Resources; Nutrition and Food Sciences; and Nursing. Students in these programs publish and produce policy briefs and analyses that help shape and monitor policy implementation and define pressing policy problems. Combined, students in these programs provide a pipeline of potential applicants to a PhD. in Policy Studies.

**Opportunities for UVM in Next Five Years.** The Policy Studies program will provide significant benefits to the social sciences. The opportunity to work with graduate students and to teach Ph.D. courses will help recruit new faculty interested in a robust research infrastructure and enhance the research and teaching experiences of current faculty, and will therefore improve the retention of high-quality researchers. This will attract excellent undergraduate students who choose programs based upon opportunities to work with leading scholars. It will also improve
our competitive position for external funding. Without Ph.D. programs and research-oriented graduate students, faculty in the social sciences have difficulty competing for funding (see Table 2). Building the capacity of the social science departments in CAS and BSAD to support graduate education and extramurally funded policy research will complement and deepen

Table 2.

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<td>$ per Award**</td>
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Table 2. Analysis of External Funding at UVM - Typical Core Social Science Areas for Public Policy Programs

The existing efforts of faculty in CALS, CESS, CEMS and the RSNR to support policy-related graduate education and policy research. The PSTRI will enhance external funding in these areas; as noted previously, transdisciplinary policy studies research is in high demand. Our Psychology Department, the only social science at UVM with a Ph.D. program and high-quality graduate students, is very successful in securing external funding; this suggests that as a university, extramural support for faculty research is not reaching its full potential.

**Federal Agency Interest:** NSF has at least 10 large funding programs that allow for a policy-related focus (see bibliography links to these programs). NIH, DOT, HUD, DOE, and the Department of Agriculture all routinely offer policy-related grant funding opportunities.

**State Agency Interest:** All state governments issue contracts for policy research. A fully operational Jeffords Center, complemented by a strong doctoral program in policy, would position UVM to be competitive for grants and contracts from states across the country.

**Private-Sector Interest:** Economic development depends upon a strong social, environmental and health infrastructure. The Vermont Business Roundtable has long acknowledged that investing in human capital is critical to economic development. A policy
studies program will offer guides to the human capital and other investments that Vermont must make to develop its economy and continue providing the high quality of life that makes it an attractive location for people and businesses.

**Non-Profit/Other Interest:** Potential sources of support include the Michigan-based Arcus Foundation, which has a joint focus on social justice and the politics of sexuality; the Ms. Foundation for Women; and the Open Society Institute, the New York-based philanthropy of financier George Soros, through its Equality and Opportunity Fund.

**Expected Faculty/Programmatic Facilities Needs Over Five Years**

**Faculty:** In order to attain national prominence in the area of policy studies, we will need to hire five additional faculty, the majority of whom should be established full professors. Although we see flexibility in terms of specific fields, we request at least one new faculty member in each of the three “spokes” of environmental governance, gerontology and social policy/social justice. We also need to hire experienced faculty in each of the following research methodologies and theoretical orientations: complex systems modeling of social systems, advanced statistical analysis, and governance and policy processes. We envision that these new hires might have overlapping expertise, e.g., a social policy expert who specializes in advanced statistical analysis. Senior faculty would be expected to bring international reputations and a portfolio of research projects with them. They would play prominent roles in attracting high-quality graduate students, would mentor these students, and aid in their successful placement. Each of the five new faculty would have a joint appointment with the Jeffords Center and an academic department. Appointments would be at the senior, research professor or distinguished research professor level, co-funded with grant-based and tuition-based sources as appropriate to the teaching and research of the scholar in question. We also envision the need for an ongoing small grants program to fund new faculty research endeavors within or across our areas of focus.
These funds would be used to foster new research programs and make them more competitive for external funding.

**Graduate Students:** We recognize that a high-quality doctoral program will require adequate funding of doctoral students. We recommend that UVM fund up to 12 doctoral students for the first two years of their enrollment in the policy Ph.D. program (for a total of 24 funded assistantships after the second year). After two years, students will be expected to obtain funding from a new or ongoing funded research project, and/or to pursue teaching and research assignments for faculty in the social sciences. Teaching by doctoral students could alleviate some of the burdens that the doctoral program might impose upon undergraduate teaching loads.

**Space, Equipment & Computational/IT:** As many as 15 faculty across 3 areas of focus are envisioned to support and be supported by the research funding and tuition basis for graduate study. Needs include: Faculty, staff and student offices, computers and internet access, meeting space, phones, a copying machine and a social science data center. A full-service data center, supported through the Jeffords Center and grant funding, will provide both linkage to existing data sets and design and support for grant applications, reporting, and graduate study. Access to the high-speed computing capabilities at the VACC will be needed to complete multilevel modeling of policy problems requiring large data sets. Such a center could be located in the UVM library system and include negotiated linkages with other state and local data warehouses and databases. Existing computational consulting currently housed in ETS (Enterprise Technology Services) could be integrated with the data center, which would be user-friendly and provide policy makers with opportunities to access data through a “decision theater” format. Sustainability would require the capacity to complete contracts for social science data analysis and attract income streams for population analysis, forecasting, and program evaluation.
**Potential Barriers to PSTRI Success and Proposed Solutions.** The challenges for this spire lies in our ability to provide incentives to UVM faculty to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries on policy research projects; to stimulate new and expand existing opportunities for extramural funding; to improve the recognition and prominence of UVM faculty and students; and to free up current faculty to teach in the Ph.D. program. For the latter, a model would have to be developed, perhaps similar to that of the Honors College, that would provide course releases for faculty to participate.

**CONCLUSION: PROJECTED METRICS FOR SUCCESS IN FIVE YEARS.**

We will evaluate the public policy program by a set of diverse criteria. First, within five years, we will want to see that the program is largely fiscally self-sustaining – that the investments made in it through Jeffords Center funds or other resources have led to long-term funding from foundations, government research support, contracts, and student fees. Second, we define success in terms of the mission of the transdisciplinary research initiative, that is, we want to see a positive impact on the ability of the University of Vermont to attract, recruit, and retain a pool of talented undergraduate students as well as a smaller body of advanced graduate students in public policy. Third, we will evaluate the Ph.D. program on where the students are employed, particularly in regard to prominent think tanks, highly regarded universities and colleges, and international policy institutions. Fourth, we will evaluate PSTRI on the basis of its impact on faculty research. We define research success as the receipt of three new broad, transdisciplinary and externally-funded research projects involving the UVM faculty and collaborators affiliated with our program within five years; the production of at least 25 article-length publications by the affiliated faculty, and significant progress toward at least 5 books in areas within the scope of public policy studies.
Selected References


\[1\] Governance refers to “the means by which an activity or ensemble of activities is controlled or directed, such that is delivers an acceptable range of outcomes according to some established social standard” (Hirst, 1997, p. 3). A more expanded view this sees the process of coordination and control as an integral dimension of policy formation and implementation. In a larger, democratic context then, “governance refers to sustaining co-ordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives such as political actors and institutions, corporate interests, civil society, and transnational organizations” (Pierre, 2002, p.3-4). Because of their central role as mechanisms of allocation, we include markets in this definition.