Introduction:
In FY 11, the University will undertake its initial round of strategic, focused investments in a limited number of transdisciplinary “spires of excellence” that offer faculty across campus the opportunity to collaborate in research and participate in graduate education. “Research” is broadly defined, encompassing the full spectrum of intellectual activity of our faculty including scholarly and creative pursuits.

Goal: To develop a compelling proposal in support of a specific transdisciplinary spire of excellence that meets as many of the following objectives as are relevant, but with particular emphasis on items (i) and (ii):

(i) Create Important New Knowledge: First and foremost, the spire of excellence will have the potential to create new knowledge relating to critical, emergent issues in our 21st century society – issues where UVM is, or could be, positioned nationally to make a significant difference and impact;

(ii) Have Excellent Recruitment Potential: The spire of excellence will have high potential for developing, attracting, and retaining a critical mass of world-class faculty expertise here at UVM such that, in the next five years, our University will be recognized as “one of the best institutions in the U.S.” – or “the best and only institution in the U.S.” – for research and graduate education in the area;

(iii) Bring Excellence and Diversity to Graduate Education: The spire of excellence will attract and retain the finest and most diverse pool of graduate students to UVM, with full expectations of their successful completion of high-quality graduate study; and bring additional depth and value to graduate teaching, marrying excellence in research with excellence in teaching;

(iv) Bring Excellence and Diversity to Undergraduate Education: The spire of excellence will attract and retain the finest and most diverse pool of undergraduate students, and will enhance, enrich, and expand undergraduate research, scholarly, and creative experiences; and bring additional depth and value to undergraduate teaching, marrying excellence in research with excellence in teaching;

(v) Have Competitive Funding Potential: The spire of excellence will have outstanding potential for national prominence and will build to the highest levels feasible for the area the capacity to secure external, often highly-competitive, funding for the long-term sustainability of the program, including grants for national research centers and “Centers of Excellence” that address critical societal issues and bring recognition and value to UVM, the State of Vermont, and the nation; and
(vi) **Have Potential to Develop UVM’s Leadership Role in Vermont’s Economic Development:** While maintaining the paramount importance of the intrinsic value, independence, and credibility of the scholarship emerging from the spire of excellence, the spire will have great potential for collaboration with emerging business and industry interests in Vermont and nationally.

**Proposal Guidelines:**
Proposals developed by each of the Working Groups shall not exceed fifteen (15) pages in length, double-spaced, in 12-point font. This length includes all charts, tables, and other supporting materials relevant to the proposal. Added references may exceed the 15 page limit.

The final proposal should have four major sections that provide an overview of the transdisciplinary spire of excellence proposed. The proposal should include brief—but compelling and data-supported—arguments for the program. It should also include the existing and emerging strengths at UVM that would support and build the program; opportunities for programmatic excellence in scholarship, service, and economic development; opportunities for new research and graduate education funding; and an analysis of the likely challenges UVM will face in developing the program over the next five years.

The graduate education component of a proposal could take many forms. We expect that most proposals will involve the creation of a new graduate program or a significant rethinking and reframing of existing graduate programs. However, it is possible for a proposal to involve the creation of a cluster of faculty with cognate research interests who would come together around a shared multi-disciplinary research program and contribute to graduate education in other disciplinary and transdisciplinary areas. Please note that we are not seeking a detailed graduate education plan at this time; graduate program planning will follow in future years.

A general proposal framework:

1. Executive Summary
2. Proposed Transdisciplinary Spire of Excellence Description
   a. Define the Spire of Excellence
   b. Define the Elements of the Proposed Research and Graduate Education Program
   c. Program Relevance to Critical Issues in 21st Century Society
   d. Opportunity for World-Class Niche in Scholarship
   e. UVM/VT Competitive Edge Potential for Resources
   f. Discussion of how the formation of a transdisciplinary faculty in this area will result in improved outcomes as compared to current status
3. Justification for a Strategic Investment
   a. Existing UVM Strengths Supporting Program, which may include
      i. Faculty
      ii. Grants
      iii. Program Reputation
      iv. Facilities
      v. Quality of Graduate Students
b. Emerging UVM Strengths Supporting Program
   i. Faculty or Prospective Hire Potential
   ii. Potential for UVM/Vermont Recognition in Focus Area

c. Alignment of Funding Availability for Program, which may include
   i. Federal Agency Interest [see: Select Federal Agency Strategic Plans]
   ii. Private Sector Interest
   iii. Non-Profit/Other Interest

d. Opportunities for UVM in Next Five Years, which may include
   i. Competitive Faculty Recruitment
   ii. Competitive Graduate Student Recruitment
   iii. Competitive Positioning for Funding (public, private, nonprofit) of National/International “Centers of Excellence” (or equivalent)
   iv. Coordination with VT Economic Development
   v. Contribution to Service and Outreach Mission

e. Expected Faculty/Programmatic Facilities Needs (Additions/Renovations) over Next Five Years
   i. Space (Individual/Collaborative)
   ii. Equipment
   iii. Computational/IT
   iv. Faculty (number of positions, which disciplines and fields, etc)

f. Potential Barriers to Success in this Field and Proposed Solutions
   i. Institutional
   ii. Pedagogical
   iii. Professional

g. Projected Metrics for Success in Five Years [see: NRC Methodology Guide–Appendix E], including a discussion of the appropriate metrics and timeline for assessment of the spire’s progress and effectiveness

IV. Conclusion

**Review Process**
A single, complete proposal from each Working Group shall be submitted to the Provost by **January 15, 2010**. Proposals will be reviewed by both internal and external advisory panels. The panels will be recommended by the Provost and Vice President for Research and approved and appointed by the President.

It is expected that the Provost and the Vice President for Research will recommend the spires of excellence for strategic investment to the President who will approve them for presentation to the Board of Trustees. The Provost will have the spires of excellence prepared for approval by the Board of Trustees by **April 15, 2010**.