The University of Vermont

Suresh V. Garimella
President

August 29, 2019

Dr. Barbara Brittingham
President
New England Commission of Higher Education
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear Dr. Brittingham,

On behalf of the University of Vermont community, I would like to begin by expressing our appreciation to Dr. David Dooley and other members of the visiting team for their service in support of the reaccreditation process for the University of Vermont (UVM). We recognize the significant time and effort involved in serving as a member of a visiting team. The team's professionalism and collegiality were deeply appreciated and will contribute to the continued success of our University.

We are gratified that the team recognized UVM's many strengths, including our outstanding staff, faculty, administrators and Board of Trustees. We deeply value and encourage the model of shared governance with the faculty. We also appreciated the attention to areas that reflect considerable work that UVM has done since the five-year interim report, such as implementing the IBB (incentive-based budget) model. While some members of the community have expressed concerns about the IBB model, we value the transparency it provides and are committed to working through remaining issues and continuing to simplify its implementation. The success of the UVM Foundation and its recently completed comprehensive campaign were, we believe, correctly highlighted. Further, we appreciate the recognition of the strong collaborative and collegial environment that exists at the University of Vermont. Our collegial environment is a point of pride, and an important contributor to the advances at UVM since the last reaccreditation visit in 2009.

Both the Self-Study process and the thoughtful observations and concerns from the visiting team have motivated the university to address the issues identified in a deliberate and thorough manner. In the remainder of this response, we highlight and provide additional context and updated information related to specific concerns that the visiting team raised in their report.

- Located in the home state of Senator Justin Smith Morrill, sponsor of the legislation that established land grant institutions in the United States, UVM considers its land grant mission to be integral – indeed central – to its past, present, and future. The report expressed concern regarding the "compartmentalization" of the land grant mission in Extension as "possibly weaken[ing] the university's case for state and private sector support." However, the steady level of state support over the past 10 years despite increased financial pressures in the state, and the highly successful UVM Foundation campaign, both demonstrate that support for UVM remains strong. Our broad commitment to the land grant mission is reflected in UVM's governance and organizational structure, starting from the 1865 charter uniting the University of Vermont and the State Agricultural College. UVM prides itself on its sustained

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85 South Prospect Street, Burlington, VT 05405
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commitment to the land grant mission across all areas of the university. Virtually every one of our colleges and institutes engages in outreach activity and research that is designed to promote the public good. Additionally, as part of our commitment to the land-grant mission, financial accessibility to all Vermonters is a top priority for us. Indeed, 40% of Vermonters attend the university tuition-free. As a product of public institutions, I bring a deep respect and an abiding commitment to the broad land grant mission of the university and have emphasized it in all my public remarks as incoming president. This commitment to the land grant mission – and related prioritization of actions – will continue to be highlighted in our communications, our engagement with the state and local communities, and our strategic planning.

- The visiting team's report mentioned that a review of different strategic planning activities showed some unevenness in coordination, tracking and evaluation across the institution or between levels of the organization. With the new strategic priorities and implementation timeline we will be announcing this fall, units will have the opportunity to reorient their planning around these priorities and associated goals. We are confident that these efforts will foster more coherent and effective institution-wide planning, as well as the evaluation of actions and outcomes associated with the plans.

- The visiting team's report identified capital planning as an area in which long-term planning has not been adequately maintained since the conclusion of the previous Campus Master Plan in 2015. I have tasked the CFO with overseeing the development of a new campus master plan that is integrated with long-term institutional financial planning. Our strategic financial planning includes enhancing our revenue diversification approaches in ways that support the university's strategic priorities. These include: building on our growing strength in non-credit professional programs and nontraditional learning offerings; extending our online presence in specific areas where UVM's academic strengths match unmet market demand; and an intentional focus on international partnerships and student global experiential learning, here on campus and internationally. All these are areas where I have personally been involved at my previous institution in bringing about transformative changes.

- The visiting team's report outlined challenges in UVM's General Education program structure, which we have introduced incrementally since 2011. There are currently 15 credits in a unified General Education curriculum taken by all UVM students, including quantitative, writing, diversity and sustainability courses; this curriculum is centrally approved and assessed. The remaining 25 credits of General Education, including requirements in key liberal arts areas such as Natural Sciences, Humanities and Arts, and Social Sciences are distributed in diverse college/school or program-level curricula. In the Self-Study process, we identified General Education as a missed opportunity to define the meaning of a UVM education for our undergraduate students. In June 2019, a UVM team attended the AACU Institute on General Education and Assessment, leading to the Provost's formation of a General Education Alignment Task Force with representation from all of the undergraduate schools and colleges. This Task Force began its work in August 2019, and will bring a proposal for a unified, centrally approved and assessed 40-credit General Education curriculum to the Faculty Senate for extended discussion in Spring 2020. The task force has outlined a 5-year implementation plan, with the expectation that full integration of the new curriculum into the UVM student experience will be completed by Fall 2023.

- The visiting team's report reflected concerns regarding the quality and consistency of academic advising across units, noting that these concerns are shared by various constituencies at UVM. The recent implementation of the EAB Student Success Collaborative ("Navigate") software has already created increased communication and coordination of advising practices among student-services staff across the institution. In Spring 2019, a group of selected faculty piloted the software with their advisees, in preparation for the Fall 2019 rollout to faculty in all units. The Office of the Provost will also continue to collaborate with the Student Government Association (SGA) on advising issues through a working group that was first launched in April 2019. This working group brings together SGA representatives, student-services professionals, key faculty, and the Division of Enrollment Management to discuss ways to improve the student advising experience in all units.

- The visiting team's report expressed concern that UVM "lags behind" the NECHE standards for assessment. UVM has made significant and substantive progress in instituting best practices for assessment of student learning outcomes, as well as developing access to a broad range of data on UVM student success. In particular, the recent development and expansion of our rich, externally facing database, Catamount Data, curated by the Office of Institutional Research, has made available not only static numbers, but rich and dynamic datasets on UVM's student population, retention and progression rates, and other information that offers a clear snapshot of "UVM." In addition to publicly available information, specific dashboards are accessible to constituencies such as department chairs and deans. The Office of Institutional Research continues to develop new dashboards to meet institutional needs.

  Additionally, through the Self-Study process it became clear that data analyst positions are currently distributed in multiple locations across the institution, leading to pockets of uncoordinated data curation. We recognize that the current staffing and organizational structure are not meeting institutional needs for assessment and have initiated a process to consolidate data analyst positions under the Office of Institutional Research, which is being renamed the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. The Director of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment will complete this transition process by the end of Spring 2020. As part of this data-centralization effort, we are evaluating current assessment-staffing needs in anticipation of identifying a coordinator position in the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment that will focus specifically on supporting assessment of student learning outcomes in General Education courses and at the program level. This consolidation of assessment and data analyst functions will provide integrated support for meeting our new strategic goals.

  In the area of assessment of student learning outcomes, UVM has made considerable progress in recent years. In our General Education program, assessment committees conduct both indirect and direct assessment of student learning outcomes. Faculty participation in annual direct assessment sessions with sampled student work has served as an important opportunity to broaden institutional expertise in assessment, while also fostering important conversations about the General Education outcomes and student achievement, as well as concrete outcomes such as revision of the Diversity requirement outcomes in Fall 2019.

  While not all programs have fully developed assessment plans, those that do have such plans are making use of available resources to conduct both direct and indirect assessment of learning outcomes at the program level. Meanwhile, outreach and training for departments on developing multi-year assessment plans is continuing, with the introduction of a new annual

department progress report during this academic year. As noted in the Self-Study, recent changes to the Academic Program Review process and a new program-proposal process directly align program evaluation with expectations for ongoing assessment. The establishment of an institutional home for assessment, and the identification of appropriate staffing to support the continued development of a culture of assessment, will enable UVM to accelerate its current momentum.

- The visiting team's report indicated that some important information was occasionally missing from specific syllabi included in the robust institution-wide sample prepared for the site visit, raising concerns regarding consistency of syllabus quality across the institution. For example, the credit hour allocation was sometimes not included on syllabi. This information is available to students through the University Catalogue and the registrar's website among others, before and during the course registration process, reflecting UVM's strong commitment to ensuring that students have appropriate information about courses prior to registering and at the start of the course. The collective bargaining agreement with faculty now requires that faculty fill out the expanded section description prior to publication of course listings for the upcoming semester, providing students access to information about the course, including expected readings and assessment methods, before registering. As noted in the visiting team's report, the university also makes available to faculty a syllabus template that reflects higher education best practices (see attached). Although UVM has carefully vetted the credit value and expectations assigned to all approved courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the Office of the Provost is now working with academic deans and department and program chairs to ensure inclusion of key elements in syllabi that will make the differential expectations for graduate students clearer.

  The Graduate College has also been systematically reviewing all 200-level (advanced undergraduate) course syllabi to ensure that the syllabi of courses offered for both graduate and undergraduate credit appropriately distinguish the amount and level of work required for graduate credit. The goals of this review are to critically evaluate how graduate programs utilize 200-level courses in their curriculum and to reduce the overall number of 200-level courses offered for graduate credit. While the visiting team expressed concern that there were inadequate resources to offer advanced undergraduate and graduate level courses, we note that our Academic Program Review process is designed to bring program viability issues such as these to the attention of deans and the Office of the Provost. Improved data tools for chairs and deans are being developed to provide regularly refreshed, key data points to assist in Academic Program Review and other evaluation processes. Through these steps, administrators can identify any gaps in the provision of advanced undergraduate and graduate coursework and find curricular or staffing solutions that ensure the quality of educational experiences for students at all levels.

- Finally, we respectfully disagree with this statement from page 14 of the team report:

  "...the team is confident that [the established process for certifying compliance with the credit hour definition]is being followed for new or modified courses. However, as has been noted, the team was unable to identify any similar procedures that address courses that predate the implementation of the Course Action Form."

In response, we note that as the UVM team was preparing the documentation and resources for the visit, we followed the recommendation from NECHE staff throughout their trainings and focused our materials on the time period since the 2014 interim report. When it became clear that the visiting team wished to see evidence of credit-hour compliance for courses approved prior to 2011, we immediately supplied them with a 35-page dossier containing evidence that each college and school had certified the credit hour compliance of all existing courses as of May 2012. An abbreviated version of this file is attached. The 2014 interim report describes UVM's 2012 process for certifying credit hour compliance on page 24. This process consisted of the following:

In November 2011, deans were asked to have their department chairs and program directors review their courses to ensure compliance. Deans were to report on the review by January 31, 2012, and all adjustments needed to achieve compliance completed by May 15, 2012. By May 2012, the deans of all colleges and schools certified that all courses that existed prior to the adoption of the new credit hour definition in 2011 were in compliance. Further, they affirmed that all future courses would be in compliance. The attached materials as well as current policy and practice demonstrate that UVM has taken appropriate steps to confirm that all course offerings at the institution comply with the federal credit hour definition.

In conclusion, I would like once again to thank the members of the visiting team, expertly chaired by Dr. David Dooley, for the dedication and professionalism with which they produced their report. It is an immensely valuable contribution to our efforts as we continue our upward trajectory at the University of Vermont. I look forward to meeting with the New England Commission of Higher Education in September to further discuss the university's Self-Study and the visiting team's report.

Sincerely yours,

Suresh V. Garimella
President

TO: File
FROM: Brian Reed, Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning
RE: Evidence of Compliance with Credit Hour Definition
DATE: April 1, 2019

This file of documents provides additional evidence that the credit hours assigned to UVM courses comply with the federal definition of credit hour. The file is comprised of a memo dated November 17, 2011 that I sent to each of the academic deans directing a review of all existing courses to ensure compliance with the definition. This exercise was conducted in communication with UVM's Office of Compliance. The rest of the file contains the written affirmations of compliance from every school and college in response to my memo. These documents demonstrate compliance for all the courses that were on the books at that time. At that time, we also instituted the current course action process with multiple review and approval steps in the Courseleaf work flow, and which requires the sponsoring unit to certify that each proposed course complies with the credit hour definition. So, we do, in fact, have strong evidence that we are in compliance with credit hour rules, examples of some weak course syllabi notwithstanding.

The University of Vermont

Office of the Provost

November 17, 2011

TO: Academic Deans

FROM: Brian Reed, Associate Provost for Curricular Affairs

RE: Process for ensuring that credit allocations for existing and future courses are in compliance with the standard adopted by the Faculty Senate.

Cc: Anna Drummond
         Erica Heffner

Per the decisions that were made at the Council of Deans meeting on November 3, I am writing to ask you to have your programs undertake a review of existing courses to ensure their credit hour allocations are in compliance with the definition of credit hour passed by the Faculty Senate in Spring 2011 (separate attachment). The process is to have your department chairs and program directors review their courses for this purpose and report their findings to you. You in turn should send a written memo to me with cc to Erica Heffner, either a) certifying that the courses in your unit have been reviewed and are in compliance with the standard; or b) reporting the deficiencies and a plan for correcting them (i.e. increase or decrease the student workload or adjust the credit hours awarded). Please send your memo **no later than January 31, 2012.** Follow-up reports on adjustments that have been made to achieve compliance will be due on May 15, 2012.

The standard adopted by the Faculty Senate sets a minimum standard of work expected of students for one earned credit. The work expected of students for a credit can exceed this minimum standard, although extremely high expectations for a given course should be examined to ensure that students are not being treated unfairly.

In the case of clinical or field courses where the traditional paradigms of hours spent in and out of class are not easily applied, the credit allocation should be justified by an explanation of how the students' clinical hours translate to the standard. This explanation, for each distinct program, should reflect a consistent approach, taking into account factors which were considered.

You should maintain records of your unit's review including standards that are established for any clinical or field courses. These records may be helpful for future accreditation processes/reviews.

As we discussed, I will work with the Faculty Senate to establish mechanism by which we will ensure that credit hour allocations for new courses are in compliance with the standard. This will most likely involve modifying the Course Action Form to include a check-off box to indicate the department and college curriculum committees and the dean have review the proposed credit allocation for compliance with the standard.

Thank you for your help.

From. Gary Derr, Vice President for Executive Operations

To: Council of Deans

Re: **Faculty Senate Action**

On January 10, 2011 the Faculty Senate approved and on February 13, 2011 President Fogel approved the following definition of a credit hour with the understanding that the language does not preclude credit hour restructuring of course offerings

> **Credit Hour:**
> 1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester of credit or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
> 2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in point (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

Please include this definition in all appropriate publications in the future.

CC.   Keith Williams
       Rachel Johnson
       Brian Reed
       James Burgmeier
       Susan Crockenberg
       Cathy Paris
       Keith Coutu
       Stacey Miller
       Fran Bazluke
       Ruth Farrell
       Sha Bradley

FACULTY SENATE

___ Faculty Senate Action (Notification – acknowledgement required)
_X_ Faculty Senate Action (Presidential Approval required)
___ Curricular Action (Presidential Approval required)

Transmitted By: James W. Burgmeier, Faculty Senate President   *James W. B___*

Presidential Action Requested By: February 14, 2011

RE: At its January 10th meeting, the Faculty Senate approved a formal definition of a credit hour at UVM.

Approve, with understanding that language does not preclude credit hour restructuring of course offerings.

Recommendation: ~~Approved as is~~   Acknowledged _____

J Knodell   *01.24.2011*

Provost & Sr. Vice President Jane Knodell   (Date)

Recommendation: *Acknowledged*

_____   *1/24/11*

General Counsel, Fran Bazluke   Date

_____   _____

Presidential Action: ✓_____   _____
                        Approved   Not Approved

                    _____
                    Decision delayed until (Date)

Comments: *Per Provost's comment*

Daniel M Fogel   *2/13/11*

President Daniel M. Fogel   Date

Returned to Senate President, with a copy to the Sr. Vice President/Provost on *March 14, 2011*

Disposition: _____

Syllabus Template Fall 2019 (M-W-F meeting pattern)

Course Number, Title, Credit Hours

Semester, Meeting Time and Place

Instructor Name, Contact Information, Office Hours

Teaching Assistant Name(s), Contact Information, Office Hours

Tutors and other support name(s), contact info, location

Pre-requisites or co-requisites
(if any)

General education (e.g. D1) or other requirements satisfied
(if applicable)

Notes on courses that may duplicate credit, if necessary (Note: It is important to ensure that this information is updated yearly and is as complete as possible.)

Course Description
The course description should give students an overview of the course. This usually includes:
- the purpose of the course
- main concepts, knowledge areas, topics covered and/or questions explored in the class
- how the course topics relate to each other
- how the course will be structured (e.g. lectures, labs, group work, etc.)

Course Learning Objectives
Learning objectives clearly state what skills or knowledge students should have mastered upon completion of the course. Generally speaking, they focus on the main concepts covered in the class and how those concepts can be applied. Learning objectives can be framed by the clause "After completing this course the student will be able to:" (followed by the list of learning objectives). If applicable, faculty may indicate in this section professional standards for their field that align with course objectives.

Pedagogy: (optional)

You may choose to describe the types of teaching/learning experiences in the course. This information may also be incorporated in your Course Description.

Required Course Materials:
Books and availability (e.g. library reserve, bookstore etc.)
Articles (on reserve, linked, course pack, etc.)
Media (location of required films, audio, etc.)
Required software (provide links for download) and internet access requirements
Other required equipment or materials and where to purchase them (e.g. iClicker)

Blackboard or other course sites:
Clearly indicate how Blackboard will be used.
Give instructions on how to access any other websites that will be used in the course
If any sites require setting up an additional account, include instructions for registration or, if providing a separate instructions document, indicate where and how students can find it

Attendance Policy and Classroom Environment Expectations:
Outline attendance and participation expectations, percentage of course grade (if applicable), and how these will be tracked or assessed.
Emphasize what work is expected to be completed before class (e.g. readings, homework, etc.) and refer to the schedule of readings and assignments below.
In certain circumstances, faculty may want to outline specific policies regarding confidentiality of classroom discussions, ground rules for face to face or online interactions, or other policies related to classroom conduct.

Grading Criteria/Policies:
Include:
- Grade components (percentages or point values for different types of graded work)
- Late policy and any other grading policies (e.g. letter grade ranges; exam curving)
- Grading schema (how numerical grade averages translate to letter grades)
- ***For 200-level courses approved for graduate credit*** *Differential grading scale (letter grade ranges) for undergraduate and graduate students reflecting the lack of D level grades for graduate students.*

Assessments (Graded Work):
Include:
- Brief descriptions of homework/assignments, projects, papers, and any other graded work. You may choose to include a description of the instructional goal or

purpose for each assessment category, as well any specific policies (e.g. papers must be typed, double-spaced).

- An explanation of the exam structure and policies
- A summary of due dates for assignments and exam dates
- ***For courses approved for graduate credit,*** *explain how graduate-level learning will be facilitated. Evaluation methods used to assess graduate student performance should also be addressed, and if the course is a 200-level offering, describe the different learning experiences and evaluation methods to be used for graduate and undergraduate students.*

Course Evaluation:
Include a statement that all students are expected to complete an evaluation of the course at its conclusion. Indicate that the evaluations will be anonymous and confidential, and that the information gained, including constructive criticisms, will be used to improve the course.

Tips for Success (optional):
Course-specific study/preparation tips
Helpful resources other than the professor (e.g. Supplemental Instruction, Learning Co-op tutors, supplemental course materials)

Visual or Other Representation of the Course (optional):
Some faculty provide a diagram or sketch representing the course structure; this can help students better understand how parts of a course relate to each other.

Student Learning Accommodations:
In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact SAS, the office of Disability Services on campus. SAS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations, which are communicated to faculty in an accommodation letter. All students are strongly encouraged to meet with their faculty to discuss the accommodations they plan to use in each course. A student's accommodation letter lists those accommodations that will not be implemented until the student meets with their faculty to create a plan.
Contact SAS:
A170 Living/Learning Center;
802-656-7753;
access@uvm.edu
www.uvm.edu/access

Religious Holidays:
Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. If you need to miss class to observe a religious holiday, please submit the dates of your absence to me in writing by

the end of the second full week of classes.   You will be permitted to make up work within a mutually agreed-upon time. https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/religious-holidays

Academic Integrity:
The policy addresses plagiarism, fabrication, collusion, and cheating.
https://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/acadintegrity.pdf

Grade Appeals:
If you would like to contest a grade, please follow the procedures outlined in this policy:
https://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/gradeappeals.pdf

Grading:
For information on grading and GPA calculation, go to
https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/grades

Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities:
http://catalogue.uvm.edu/undergraduate/academicinfo/rightsandresponsibilities/

FERPA Rights Disclosure:
The purpose of this policy is to communicate the rights of students regarding access to, and privacy of their student educational records as provided for in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974.
http://catalogue.uvm.edu/undergraduate/academicinfo/ferparightsdisclosure/

Promoting Health & Safety:
The University of Vermont's number one priority is to support a healthy and safe community:

Center for Health and Wellbeing:
https://www.uvm.edu/health

Counseling & Psychiatry Services (CAPS)
Phone: (802) 656-3340

C.A.R.E.
If you are concerned about a UVM community member or are concerned about a specific event, we encourage you to contact the Dean of Students Office (802-656-3380).   If you would like to remain anonymous, you can report your concerns online by visiting the Dean of Students website at https://www.uvm.edu/studentaffairs

Final Exam Policy:
The University final exam policy outlines expectations during final exams and explains timing and process of examination period. https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/final-exams

Alcohol and Cannabis Statement:

The Division of Student Affairs has offered the following statement on alcohol and cannabis use that faculty may choose to include, or modify for inclusion, in their syllabus or Blackboard site:

Statement on Alcohol and Cannabis in the Academic Environment

As a faculty member, I want you to get the most you can out of this course. You play a crucial role in your education and in your readiness to learn and fully engage with the course material. It is important to note that alcohol and cannabis have no place in an academic environment. They can seriously impair your ability to learn and retain information not only in the moment you may be using, but up to 48 hours or more afterwards. In addition, alcohol and cannabis can:

- Cause issues with attention, memory and concentration
- Negatively impact the quality of how information is processed and ultimately stored
- Affect sleep patterns, which interferes with long-term memory formation

It is my expectation that you will do everything you can to optimize your learning and to fully participate in this course.

Course Schedule for Fall 2019 (M-W-F meeting pattern)

Date	Topics/Activities	Readings/Preparation
M, 8-26		
W, 8-28		
F, 8-30		
M, 9-2 Holiday		
W, 9-4		
F, 9-6		
M, 9-9		
W, 9-11		
F, 9-13		
M, 9-16		
W, 9-18		
F, 9-20		
M, 9-23		
W, 9-25		
F, 9-27		
M, 9-30		
W, 10-2		
F, 10-4		
M, 10-7		
W, 10-9		
F, 10-11		

Date	Topics/Activities	Readings/Preparation
M, 10-14 Recess		
W, 10-16		
F, 10-18		
M, 10-21		
W, 10-23		
F, 10-25		
M, 10-28		
W, 10-30		
F, 11-1		
M, 11-4		
W, 11-6		
F, 11-8		
M, 11-11		
W, 11-13		
F, 11-15		
M, 11-18		
W, 11-20		
F, 11-22		
M, 11-25 Recess		
W, 11-27 Recess		
F, 11-29 Recess		
M, 12-2		

Date	Topics/Activities	Readings/Preparation
W, 12-4		
F, 12-6		
	Final Exam information	