**Responses to Questions Raised at the Faculty Senate
Regarding Professional Standards Committee (PSC) Voting Resolution**

At the Faculty Senate meeting on Oct 23, 2017 a scheduled vote on a resolution regarding PSC voting procedures (i.e., voting at or below rank) was tabled until the November 2017 Faculty Senate meeting in order to gather additional information requested by faculty senators: (a) percentages of male and female faculty at various ranks, and (b) any information on the rationale for why voting at or below one's own rank is a desirable practice.

Steps taken: The Faculty Senate President and PSC Chair sought data and/or gathered perspectives from: (a) the UVM Office of Institution Research, (b) a set of nationally recognized scholars who study higher education at UVM, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, University of Georgia, University of Arizona, Claremont Graduate College, University of Southern California, Michigan State University and Penn State University, and (c) internet searching.

What we found...

1. **Table 1. Percentages of female and male faculty members by rank**

	Full Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor
Male	71% (n=185)	53% (n=121)	53% (n=62)
Female	29% (n=76)	47% (n=106)	47% (n=56)
Totals	N=261	N=227	N=118

* Based on November 2017 data, including instructional faculty (not administrators with concurrent faculty appointments) from all Colleges, Extension, & Libraries

Wide variation in the percentage of full professors exists by unit. Only one unit (CHNS) has a higher percentage of female full professors (83%, n=5) than male (17%, n=1). Libraries are at 50% with a small n (1 male; 1 female). All other units have a higher percentage of male than female full professors, ranging from 57% - 87%.

The number of full professors (male and female combined) by units ranges from 2 (Libraries) to 103 (College of Arts & Sciences); here is the list by unit:

Table 2. Number of full professors by unit

College/Unit (N of PSC Reps)	N of Full Professors	Percent of a Unit's Full Professors Serving on the PSC if they Only Sent Full Professors
Libraries (1)	2	50%
CESS (1)	5	20%
CNHS (1)	6	16.6%
GSB (1)	8	12.5%
RSENR	10	10%
CALS/Extension* (1)	17/6	4.3%
CEMS (1)	27	3.7%
LCOM (2)	77	2.6%
CAS (2)	103	1.9%

* Voluntarily, Extension retains it own member until the end of 2017-18.

As depicted in the right column of Table 2, the potential impact of populating the PSC with full professors varies across units.

2. As reminder, the **resolution under consideration by the Faculty Senate pertains only to the PSC**, because both the Faculty Senate By-Laws and CBA are silent on PSC voting procedures, whereas as the CBA includes language related to both department/unit and college-level (Faculty Standards Committee) voting.

In reference to department/unit voting the CBA (Section 5.f. ii) states:
"All departmental/unit faculty are permitted to read and comment on the dossier. However, in all tenure or promotion/tenure cases, only department tenured faculty are permitted to vote on such recommendations."

"In all other promotion cases – whether tenure-track or non-tenure-track – only those department faculty who hold the same or higher rank than that being sought by the candidate are permitted to vote on the promotion recommendation. However, a department may allow Associate Professors to vote on promotion to Professor if indicated in its RPT guidelines and procedures. Whether tenure-track or not, Professors are permitted to vote on any such case; Associate Professors are permitted to vote on

promotion to Associate Professor or Senior Lecturer; and Assistant Professors and Senior Lecturers are permitted to vote on promotion to Senior Lecturers."

In reference to college-level voting the CBA (5.f.iii) states: *"Composition of the FSC [Faculty Standards Committee] is determined by the College/School/Unit and is not subject to the voting limitations outlined in Section 5.f.ii above. The FSC will assess the candidate's record and make a written recommendation to the Dean on the proposed personnel action under review, which will include the numerical anonymous vote of the Committee."*

One of the scholars from whom we received information contacted the AAUP (American Association of University Professors) and offered this: *"What AAUP requires is that an academic institution and its components have a written policy about the tenure review process. When AAUP censures an institution for a violation it's because of a violation in that written process, not the content of the process."* While this statement does not directly address the rationale for the resolution under consideration, it does suggest that UVM should have a written policy on tenure and promotion. While has such policies, as indicated earlier, UVM has written clarity at the departmental and FSC levels, but no such clarity at the PSC level.

3. In reference to the rationale for voting at or below rank, the feedback from higher education scholars who study the academy suggests the following:

a. Most universities, including UVM, have a longstanding tradition of being a ranked-based (hierarchical) system for faculty advancement. While the merits and potential drawbacks of rank-based systems may be debated (e.g., existing norms may perpetuate the status quo, demographically, intellectually, and in various other ways), they are the overwhelmingly predominant approach in America universities. Voting at or below rank is congruent with such a rank-based system.

b. The practice of voting at or below rank is widespread and longstanding in peer and aspirant universities.

c. Literature on the rationale for the practice of voting at or below rank is scant/non existent, even though the practice is widespread. This was confirmed by our independent web-based searching and confirmed by the scholars from whom we received input. One scholar noted that there is no known empirical research on this topic.

d. The most ubiquitous rationale mentioned is the **expertise argument**. This is simply the notion that, *"... those in higher ranks are best able to judge the contributions of others who have requested promotion to that rank. Those in the higher ranks have satisfied the criteria by which their promotions have been assessed, and they then employ them to assess others who apply for promotion to that rank. Some may label it as hierarchical, but achievement is progressive in correspondence to a career line".*

e. A variation on the expert argument is that voting at or below rank *"**operationalizes and reinforces genuine peer review**."*

f. Another rationale is what one scholar referred to as the **organizational imperative argument**. *"The system [voting at or below rank] also operates on behalf of the welfare of colleagues and organizations. A well-functioning organization would not set up a system whereby people of lower rank vote on others of higher rank. Such a system would: (1) squelch candid assessments of candidates for promotion (e.g., an untenured assistant professor speaking freely about the merits of a colleague up for promotion to full?), and (2) create structural incentives for retaliation (e.g., good luck to that assistant professor who speaks freely and critically about the colleague who is promoted to full)."*

   The scholar commenting above notes a conceptual parallel. *"All tenured faculty members (in this scholar's department) are eligible to serve on post-tenure review committees. This means that associates serve on post-tenure review committees of full professors. It clearly makes the associates vulnerable. They are not free to speak, they know the dangers, and so the review (while essentially pro-forma, unlike promotions) formally does not serve its purpose."*

   Another scholar who studies this topic wrote: *"... it's entirely inappropriate for promotion and tenure committee members of the same rank as a candidate recommended for a higher rank to vote on that recommendation. Such a situation simply presents too many potential conflicts of interest, whether professional, personal, or both. The promotion and tenure situation is (in my mind, at least) not an election; it's the conferral of a distinct honor and with decidedly non-trivial department, college/school, and institutional quality and financial implications.*

g. Related to the organizational imperative is the **faculty equity imperative**. Namely, in fairness to faculty being reviewed, it should be clear, transparent, and consistent how recommendations are made and by whom at the PSC level (i.e., voting eligibility). Since the voting practices have varied over time in the absence any written guidance, it opens the door to faculty grievances. For example, if a faculty member is denied promotion to full professor based, in part, on a negative recommendation from the PSC where votes on this matter were cast above rank (Associate Professors recommending against the promotion of someone to Full Professor) the denied faculty member could reasonably argue that this practice is unfair as it violates ubiquitous and longstanding standards of practice nationally.

h. One scholar external to UVM who reviewed the proposed PSC resolution indicated that our provision, *Regardless of voting eligibility, the perspectives of all members will be considered in both presenting RPT cases and the subsequent discussions prior voting, because regardless of rank all PSC members have valuable perspectives to share that can inform the vote*, is "already outside the norm, and perhaps in a very interesting and good way."