

At the February 27, 2023 meeting of the Faculty Senate of UVM, members of the Senate broke into groups and discussed four questions through the breakout room function in Teams. Each group appointed a person to serve as notetaker. These notetakers reported out some of the key points made in their conversations and submitted fuller notes to the Senate office. This document is a summary of those discussions. It is submitted to the Senate and will also be delivered to the UVM administration.

I have listed the questions with a summary of feedback from Senators.

4) What are the academic initiatives that you would like to see the administration pursue, or the Faculty Senate pursue or advocate for?

The issues raised by the Senate roundtables were less about specific initiatives that Senators would like to see and more about the concerns that seemed to be broadly shared. Senators articulated a sense of being squeezed and pressured by declining numbers of members of the faculty and growing enrollments. They raised concern over the appropriate level of staffing, a looming concern over the quality of the education that we provide, perceiving a decline in the quality of writing. Others spoke of concern about internal cohesion and a pervasive sense of internal competition as well as “workload creep,” the sense that we are growing without concomitant growth of human capacity and infrastructure.

If we turn these concerns around, Senators spoke to the importance of combining resources (one example raised was that LCOM and Vet students share more classes in the first years of their training; there are no doubt other examples of this). Senators also spoke to an interest to see rules that emerged during the pandemic to handle that moment be eased (such as travel authorizations for domestic travel and an increased paperwork burden for guest speakers).

Senators also expressed interest in hearing about how plans have been developing in relation to the Art and Science report. Perhaps this could be a focus of an early Senate meeting in the fall.

2) The President and the Provost have said that they would like to grow the graduate program at UVM – what are some areas that you would like to see us expanding our graduate education?

In engaging with this questions, Senators expressed some significant reservations. These broadly broke down into two different areas. The first was a concern with faculty capacity. A number of senators expressed concern that many departments and programs feel constrained in terms of faculty resources and without significant hiring increasing the number or expanding of graduate programs is difficult to imagine. The second concern had to do with the resources (financial and human) required to mount and manage graduate programs. Senators’ comments reflected a variety of experiences with graduate programs, but the concerns raised included: programs being able to afford dedicated administrative support; that UVM’s high F & A rates make it harder to afford as many graduate students; uncertain levels or capacity to provide grad students with stipends, as well as the very high cost of living.

Senators also wondered if there is a clear shared understanding of what a high-quality education at the masters and PhD levels looks like.

Senators wanted to have a greater understanding of what balance of programs the administration is interested in. This might provide an opportunity for the new Dean of the Graduate College to speak to the Senate in the Fall.

Senators did not have many specific suggestions in this context, but some that came up were:

Physician assistant program; Combined premed-med program; Expand 4+1 teaching certificate by trying to get CAS and CESS to align requirements; American Politics, History and Culture, leverage new materials like Leahy and Sanders papers

3) What are your impressions/view on pandemic recovery? Are there areas that you would advise the administration to change policy or increase investment?

Senators expressed the need or desire to return to “normal” conditions, but many expressed concerns about the conditions of students. Many students seem less resilient, experiencing more anxiety and other challenges. They seem “easier to lose” in the context of a class and less likely to engage than they used to be. Senators expressed the sense of unintentional taxes on their time – they need to spend more time and energy managing extensions, for example.

A number of Senators expressed a desire for greater conversation and guidelines about managing these conditions: how to handle extensions, streaming of class lectures, illness and attendance. There is a desire to be supportive of students and flexible, but not to the extent of enabling students inappropriately.

Additional issues raised were:

A concern that the Wifi feels like its failing under the increased load; a desire to end travel authorizations for domestic travel; a request to reopen the food services that were shut down; a lack of clinical placements for students in the health sciences; and the ongoing challenge of child care.

4) How has academic year influenced your views on these issues? What has gone well and what are you anxious about?

In response to this, Senators expressed many of the same issues that they have already been described: a concern about loss of faculty colleagues; feeling stretched; the impact of social isolation (and the loss of collegiality with people working from home more often); a concern about how to maneuver back to normal attendance policies in class.

One additional point expressed was a desire for UVM and its Faculty to be active participants in the effort to resolve problems around guns and violence, and that while we haven't yet experienced these issues on campus, we should not assume that we won't.