

Summary of Senate feedback on Art and Science report and Executive Council recommendations:

On February 28, at the Senate meeting, Senators had the opportunity to provide their thoughts, concerns and recommendations on the report provided to UVM by the Art and Science group, entitled “Institutional Strategic Study.” Senators had been informed that they would have the opportunity to provide feedback approximately two weeks before the Senate meeting when President Borchert sent senators an email that included the link to the report available on the Provost’s website. Utilizing the breakout function in Teams, Senators were put into 10 rooms with 4-6 senators, and discussed three questions for approximately twenty minutes. They were asked to take notes on their discussion and send these to both the Faculty Senate office and to President Borchert. This report is a synthesis of this feedback and also recommendations from the Executive Council.

The questions that the Senators were asked are as follows:

1. What are at least 2 points that you take from the report that you would like to see UVM implement, and how? (10 min)
2. Are there programs or activities that UVM is doing that you think we should expand as a result of this report? (5 min)
3. What is at least one concern that you have and how would you like to see these addressed? (5 min)

Aspects of the Report Senators supported:

Senators unsurprisingly emphasized different parts of the report in their answers to these questions, but a few themes came through very clearly. The two most common (in 7 out of 10 reports) recommendations that we focus on were to attend to questions of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and experiential learning. There was also strong support for enhanced foreign language instruction (in five of the reports).

In terms of DEI, the most common focus was to suggest the need to expand the diversity of the faculty, through both recruitment and retention. As one report noted, “our applicants rightly understand that we are a very white campus and are looking for more diversity.” Two reports also suggested there was an important need to increase the number of international students and faculty. The comments were not substantial or specific – this is a difficult challenge for the university, but it’s also one that I think we collectively understand. Many of the Faculty respondents emphasized its importance, without feeling a need to elaborate on it.

There was also significant support for experiential learning. A number of reports brought up ways in which this is working within the University already, while also acknowledging that these resources may be underutilized and under-resourced. Senators referred to a variety of different programs within their units, and several highlighted the importance of the Community Engaged Learning Office as a useful model that might be expanded, as well as civic and service-learning opportunities.

Senators also raised concerns around experiential learning. A few reports noted that internships and experiential learning are unevenly implemented throughout the University, and that the culture of UVM does not necessarily encourage this kind of learning. Others noted the uneven quality of experiential learning across campus. Several Senators noted that in the last decade UVM has invested a lot in expanding experiential learning, internships, and improving advising, but the fruits of these investments may not be fully known or realized. Part of this is no doubt because COVID paused a

variety of initiatives, but it may also be that there are more pockets of this work than is widely understood. We would benefit – perhaps – from some centralization of these programs, or perhaps central guidance. Moreover, Senators also raised concerns about the resources required to mount effective experiential learning systems: it takes a lot of work and our administrative staffing is down; that faculty regularly guide experiential learning projects as overloads; that as faculty have declined, there are not enough people to do this work; and ensuring equity of access to these is important (a point that the Art and Science report also makes). One group also raised the issue that it would be good if we structure the experiential learning on campus such that co- and extra-curricular activities are also effective places for experiential learning opportunities.

Faculty expressed broad support for implementing expanded foreign language offerings and expanding global engagement at UVM, either through making study abroad experiences more accessible (COVID aside) or internationalizing the campus more – but faculty also expressed competing visions about how to implement initiatives around global engagement. There was not a singular vision about how best to expand foreign language work at UVM.

Concerns raised

Faculty expressed a number of concerns. The most common were about the methodology (half of the reports), and concern about the terminology suggestions (such as “Venture”; 6/10 reports). Half also expressed concern about inadequate resources to support initiatives (as noted in the discussion about experiential learning), and a concern that either the solutions did not match the problems expressed or that the suggestions were ultimately too broad to be meaningful.

In terms of methodology, faculty were deeply concerned that they could not see various aspects of what Art and Science had done to produce this report; there were reasonable concerns about what is and is not visible. As scholars, we are required to make our methodology visible, and there were concerns that almost none of it was. We all understand Art and Science’s claim to protect their proprietary methodology, but it made it harder for Senators to trust what was being said. This was particularly the case when some of the suggestions within the report were not the most obvious. For example, that DEI issues produced the biggest impact with the target audience but were not among the major proposals within the report.

An additional concern had to do with the language used and proposed within the report. Many Senators raised a number of issues with the term “entrepreneurial.” Some felt the term was vague and unclear; others felt it did not express the full spirit of UVM. Only one of the reports viewed it favorably, and this was in the context of experiential learning. Only three reports referred to the term “Venture,” all unfavorably. It was also unclear to Senators how the term “global” was to be engaged. We do a number of programs and activities that emphasize the global (and as noted above, many Senators approved of the idea of greater foreign language engagement), but beyond language study, it was unclear to Senators what “global” meant beyond a buzzword.

Recommendations from the Senate Executive Council

Based on our discussions with the Art and Science group and on our conversations and the feedback from the Senators, we want to emphasize several matters:

First, we urge the administration to continue its work in fostering conditions of diversity, equity and inclusion at UVM, including making the investments necessary to recruit and retain faculty of color.

Second, we suggest the need to have a better understanding of the various kinds of experiential learning that take place on campus through an inventory of these programs. This inventory (referenced on slide 79; some of which has no doubt already been done) would have a few benefits: 1) it gives Enrollment Management and University Communications clear examples to highlight; 2) it will make visible where we might make investments to expand experiential learning. One might imagine investments that expand existing programs, or investments that encourage faculty in units/academic programs where experiential learning is less common, to develop or expand programs. This might be done through professional development, financial incentives or both. It will take careful thought about how to define what kinds of programs are seen as doing this work.

Third, the Art and Science (slide 67; p 34) report suggests convening Faculty and Administration to “define purpose and goals of UVM’s Venture, Define learning outcomes; and develop meaningful educational experiences to achieve these outcomes.” We agree with the spirit of this suggestion but are less clear about the particular points set out here. In particular, the “Venture” vocabulary feels gimmicky to Senators rather than substantive. Moreover, we have in a sense already articulated important learning outcomes through the development of the Catamount Core Curriculum. We think it would be valuable for the Provost to bring together a group of faculty from a variety of units in summer 2022 to develop concrete recommendations for programs that might be developed or expanded. We envision this as a small but diverse group that might meet over a few days, comprising some faculty who worked with Art and Science all year, a few administrators, but also faculty who work with the curriculum within their units, and also some who might be skeptical of the suggestions in the report.

Fourth, this is only indirectly a part of the report, but it may be necessary to provide guidance for faculty in relation to advising. Units have done a significant amount of outsourcing of advising to professional advisors, and this is reasonable, but it is also important to help faculty understand how to link the professional and mentoring aspects of advising that is important for the students that are the target of the Art and Science report. There are many good advisors on campus, and there are resources available if people want to become better advisors, but it is also probably worth investing some resources of energy and time into harmonizing the advising work of the faculty, giving us tools for understanding how to be better advisors.