

Draft Minutes of the Special Graduate College Faculty Meeting
November 23, 2009
Monday, 4:00 – 5:00 p.m., Memorial Lounge, UVM

Present: About 150 members of the Faculty and Graduate Faculty
Presiding: VP for Research and Dean of the Graduate College Domenico Grasso

The Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College Domenico Grasso called the meeting to order, and noted that this was a Special Meeting of the Graduate Faculty, called by petition, to discuss an advisory resolution proposed by a group of faculty.

In his opening remarks, Dean Grasso stated that academic strategic planning is a systematic process designed to develop and analyze visions for the future of a university, and to guide decisions about allocation of financial and other resources. At UVM, its intent is to develop coherent and strategic responses to current and anticipated conditions within and outside the university, and to build on capabilities and opportunities specific to UVM and Vermont. The University has limited resources and seeks to use those wisely. Thus, the TRI process has evolved from prior strategic planning efforts and it involves faculty from all units across campus. Indeed, President Fogel had spoken at the last Graduate Faculty meeting in April 2009 about the strategic plan for 2009-2013, noting that the University expected to make strategic investments in selected areas of research, scholarship and the creative arts, in developing our reputation as one of the nation's premier small research universities. Many faculty members were involved in the university's strategic planning processes, and that plan was ultimately brought before the full Faculty Senate, where it was unanimously endorsed last May. Building on UVM's approved strategic plan, the TRI process now aims to link vision and mission with resource allocation, involving faculty members in many capacities (in working groups, in open forums, with input from Deans and units). If, based on claims of a lack of information, some faculty now call for the TRI process to be stopped, then one might assume that there is not enough information to allocate resources at all – or that the faculty do not wish to have input into the process. This seems counter to the enormous interest already shown by the wide range of faculty who are participating in the TRI process.

After this introduction, Dean Grasso opened the meeting to discussion. The advisory resolution proposed by a group of faculty was read:

“While it may be advisable for the University to consider strategies for selective investments of certain resources to enhance our research enterprise, the benefits and costs of the current strategy, both financial and pedagogical, have not been demonstrated. We therefore request that the current TRI process be suspended until careful and diligent analyses are performed to inform and guide any initiative that potentially impacts our current research environment.”

A discussion was held among the faculty members present.

The following issues were raised in support of the proposed resolution:

- The perception of a very speedy process for TRI work groups and decisions; some described this as unduly speedy
- The impact of decisions made for research investment on the availability of resources to support, in particular, undergraduate teaching
- The issue of how spires were originally identified, why they are described as transdisciplinary, and whether other topical areas could also be considered
- The potential impacts of TRI spires on program decisions about instruction, hiring decisions, and faculty workload, and whether focusing instruction and faculty hires around spire topics would divide the faculty or re-invigorate programs
- The availability of resources to support spire initiatives, especially in a time of scarce resources across the University
- The effect of the TRI process ultimately on resource allocation (including GTAs)

The following comments were voiced in support of the on-going TRI process:

- The TRI process brings together groups of faculty who share broad interests in topics, and many new synergies will result from these collaborative exercises
- A critical mass of faculty in interest areas will help UVM be competitive in national rankings, leading to new hires of stellar faculty members and better quality of programs
- The TRI process has evolved from earlier UVM processes identifying topics that all have had on-going grassroots support across campus units; faculty have been asked to provide input at all stages of the TRI process
- The TRI process will help in focusing and enlivening our graduate programs, many of which are too small, and have too few graduates, to be competitive nationally
- The goal of building excellence in research programs is being achieved by the linkages already made through constitution of the spire groups and their requests for faculty input and discussion
- The expectation that spires can and will be shaped to create programs of interest and importance to the faculty

President Fogel briefly spoke about the long-term processes of strategic planning at UVM, the ways that the TRI fits within this process, and about the notable increases to faculty salaries, budgets, and quality of applicants over time that have resulted from these kinds of reasoned and inclusive planning efforts. He expressed appreciation for the current faculty-driven TRI working groups who, by their engagement in processes of analysis and visioning, will help distinguish UVM and its programmatic strengths. He also noted that a central assumption of the TRI process is that the quality of undergraduate education will be preserved as well as enhanced.

Finally, a call for a vote was made. Several members of the audience requested a vote by ballot, and it was proposed that, in line with current Graduate College practices, an electronic ballot

would be issued. The Graduate College will make arrangements for this, and the vote will occur after Thanksgiving break.

The meeting adjourned at 5:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen A. Merchant