



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT STAFF COUNCIL

To: President Suresh Garimella
Provost and Senior Vice President Patricia Prelock
Vice President for Finance and Treasurer Richard Cate

From: Staff Council President Stephen Lunna
Staff Council Vice President Caleb Gilbert

Re: Racism and Inequity at UVM

Date: June 12, 2020

During and after the June 9, 2020 Staff Council Monthly meeting, which was attended by hundreds of UVM staff members, concerns about institutionalized racism and inequity at UVM were voiced both aloud and in the accompanying text chat. We wish to open this letter with a frank statement of our own serious failings at that meeting. We the Officers of Staff Council, and the staff of the Staff Council office, failed to adequately amplify questions presented by several Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) staff members attending the meeting. This caused serious harm. We have now begun the urgent task of re-evaluating and re-imagining the structure and process of our meetings going forward, and of educating ourselves further, and in an ongoing fashion, about our own participation in systemic racism at UVM.

While we grapple with our own struggles to do better, we remain committed to both presenting the concerns of our constituents to UVM Administration, and to challenging our colleagues and our community about their participation in ongoing racist structures. We believe that UVM Administration— as leaders of a community which overwhelmingly wants to grow and to change its racist structures and communities to antiracist structures and communities—shares Staff Council’s wish to foster this growth and change. To that end, we’ve compiled a list of comments and corresponding questions, most of which are paraphrased directly from BIPOC staff who participated in the written chat, and for whose labor and time we are grateful. We would appreciate your formal responses to these questions:

- To many staff, the timing of the memo’s release—during extremely heightened antiracism protests—felt tone-deaf and “inhumane.”
 - Please comment on this timing and the context around it.
- Although it is acknowledged that there will inevitably be an impact on staff in managing this budget shortfall, there was still a lack of transparency, clarity, and equity in the administration’s decision-making process. One important result of this is that the disparate impact of these cuts on our BIPOC community members was not named nor addressed. For context, according to the Office of Institutional Research, an extremely small percentage of BIPOC work in management and/or administration at UVM, with the vast majority being listed simply as “employees.” As it is reasonable to assume that those in management and administration earn higher salaries, it follows that those who are sacrificing the least in these cuts are overwhelmingly white. This carries a clear message that these individuals are somehow more worthy, with the attending implication that this worth comes from their race and class.
 - Please address why Staff Council was not involved in the decision-making process.
 - Please address why the percentage cuts stop rising at \$80,000.

- In the meeting, Richard Cate undermined the statements of BIPOC by saying "we are all impacted," thus echoing the dismissive gaslighting used by "All Lives Matter" advocates. He demonstrated an inability to empathize with or consider others' realities. And his frank admittance that the core values detailed in Our Common Ground may be sacrificed when financial resources are not plentiful clearly delineated a lack of understanding and commitment to OCG and the UVM community as a whole.
 - Please respond to these concerns.
- In the meeting, Staff Council officers, Staff Council members, and Richard Cate repeatedly deferred questions about race to Dr. Wanda Heading-Grant, a Black woman. However, all senior leadership at UVM, including Staff Council leadership and Richard Cate, must be prepared to address uncomfortable race-related questions. This should be a core competency rather than a special talent which only BIPOC have.
 - What steps will be taken to ensure this core competency is achieved for all senior administration?
- People of color at UVM not only have their jobs to do, but also the labor of navigating implicit and explicit aggression and racism from UVM community members, and of helping students of color navigate the same. They often act as advisors for white colleagues who are unwilling to make race-related decisions on their own. They are often tapped to serve on committees and outreach initiatives. BIPOC are engaged in daily unpaid labor that ultimately helps to make UVM a better, more equitable, more educated and aware community.
 - Will senior administration and managers be taking into account the labor of BIPOC when they make decisions about who is asked to take mandatory furloughs?
- Although the UVM Campus Children's School may have helped only a small number of UVM staff members, cutting childcare services impacts women and lower-paid staff, including BIPOC staff, much more.
 - Please address this inequity and let affected staff know what measures you will be taking to assist them.
- A staff member wrote: "Diversity and equity issues cannot be addressed in a bubble."
 - How will you ensure that future decisions made by administration for the welfare of the University will take issues of equity into account?

We look forward to ongoing, constructive dialogue between UVM staff and administration around these questions, as we continue to hold ourselves and each other accountable for our mistakes. The UVM community has come a long way together addressing issues of equity and institutionalized racism, and we can travel the long road ahead together too.