



The University of Vermont

Suresh V. Garimella

President

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

From: President Suresh Garimella
Provost and Senior Vice President Patricia Prelock

Re: Staff Council Memo titled “Racism and Inequity at UVM”

Date: June 18, 2020

Thank you for your memo of June 12th as a follow-up to concerns raised by some employees during and after the June 9th Staff Council meeting. Although we offer some perspective on the questions you posed in your memo below, we would welcome an opportunity to talk with the leadership of Staff Council to hear their perspectives and share how the principles of Our Common Ground are foundational to our decision-making even as we work to ensure the financial viability of the university.

Timing of the financial memo and context. We understand that some felt the timing of the memo failed to consider the impact of recent external events. We also understand it is difficult to process a salary reduction when individuals are struggling with so many other challenges. Timing was in no way intended to be insensitive to external events. Rather, once we had the financial numbers available, we wanted to provide staff with as much advance notice as possible about wage changes, as the new fiscal year was fast approaching.

Equity in the decision-making for cuts in wages. We used a progressive, percentage-based approach to establish wage decreases in consideration of our mutual commitment to fairness. We wanted to provide special protection for our lowest-paid employees with no cuts, and as wages increased the percentage contribution increased, knowing that a 5% cut at \$80,000 is \$4,000 but the same cut at \$200,000 is \$10,000. We value the input of our staff, and yet the complexities and uncertainties of this year’s budget did not afford opportunities for as much engagement across campus as we would normally desire.

Our Common Ground. As mentioned above, the values expressed in Our Common Ground are foundational to our decision-making process. We work hard to balance our fiscal responsibility with decisions that respect the impact on our community as one university while continuing to innovate for a new future.

Senior leaders’ commitment to addressing issues of racism. With the leadership of Dr. Wanda Heading-Grant and the training provided by her and members of her team in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, senior leaders recognize their role in being vigilant on issues of

racism and relevant action. Using the Framework for Inclusive Excellence and the 2019 Climate Survey results, Dr. Heading-Grant has worked with us to establish an expectation for change across all units that will help guide our vision for the future. Additionally, the university's senior leadership participates in mandatory diversity training on an annual basis and is dedicated to developing and maintaining competency in this area.

Campus Children's School. We understand the anxiety families are experiencing about the uncertainty of childcare and the particular impact it has on women and lower-paid staff. As we described in our recent memo to the community, we view early childhood education and care as a profoundly important issue. That is why we assigned a working group under the direction of Human Resource Services to investigate a different approach. Four of the eight members of the working group are staff members. In the short term, CESS has contacted each impacted family with an offer to facilitate connections to resources available in the community to assist families in finding childcare placements.

Future decision-making by senior administration. We will work closely with the Staff Council and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to effect positive change. We continue to diversify our nine senior leaders, who currently include three people of color and four women who bring diverse perspectives to critical discussions. Of the 34 Officers of Administration, eight are people of color and 15 are women. The chair of the Board of Trustees is African-American and the vice chair is a woman. We recognize the importance of considering diversity and equity impacts during decision-making.

We look forward to the Staff Council's input and partnership as we continue to make progress in these areas so central to our collective future, wellbeing and success.