

Campus-wide Leadership Retreat (6/5/17)
Remarks by D. Rosowsky, Provost

I'd like to offer some comments, and share some of my thinking and some of my commitments, as Chief Academic Officer, around **diversity** and **inclusion**.

The provost's role is somewhat unique. As Chief Academic Officer, I look across the entirety of our academic programs. I have responsibility not only for the quality of our academic programs, but for ensuring an academic *fabric* across the University – one that provides both breadth and depth, spans and includes critical topics and essential skills, and helps to create a compelling and distinctive *academic ecosystem* that attracts the best students, faculty, and staff – leveraging our intellectual, physical, and financial resources to maximize both our potential and our impact.

In my role, I also pay attention to the dynamics of the curriculum, and to issues and challenges expressed by students as well as faculty as they navigate both curricular and classroom experiences.

By now, you know me as an advocate for excellence – a proponent of needed and strategic change, and a constant voice for thoughtful evolution of programs and purpose. It's OK to change and – whether necessary or strategic – it's good to evolve. By focusing on our highest priorities, and striving to meet our highest ideals, we achieve our best destiny as a great university.

When something needs attention or refining, when something is not working, or not working optimally, or not fully adopted, or not functioning as intended, it is my role as provost (to the extent it impacts our academic mission, our ability to provide the best possible university education in the best possible educational environment, or the quality of our academic programs) to seek a solution, to affect change.

In some cases, I alone have responsibility and authority; in other cases, my office works in partnership with other offices or groups on campus; and in some cases the responsibility and authority resides entirely with other offices or groups. In that case, my role as provost is to identify the issue, suggest a timeline (and where appropriate a process), and enable others to identify and implement the best solution.

In all cases as provost, I endeavor to provide vision and leadership, while respecting the roles and responsibilities of governance groups. It is a tricky balance to strike, and I continue to learn, even after four years as provost.

I want to speak today to several issues in particular (again in my role as provost) and offer some observations and make some commitments.

First, I want to speak to diversity and inclusion as they relate to curricular and to classroom experiences, of both our students and our faculty. I want to be very clear that I support our General

Education model at UVM. I support the process that was established to identify and implement specific Gen Ed requirements, and I support the D1/D2 diversity requirement.

We were one of the first universities in the nation to adopt a diversity Gen Ed requirement. It is something that not only speaks to our values and advances our goals as an institution of higher education, but attracts national attention and positions UVM as an exemplar for other universities to emulate. We have some incredibly talented faculty who have committed to creating the D1/D2 requirement, develop curriculum, and who teach D1 and D2 classes. While we have much to point to indicating success, we also know there always are opportunities to improve.

On occasion we hear concerns – from students and from faculty – about the D1/D2 course content, inconsistent rigor and treatment of critical issues related to race and inclusion, about the preparedness of faculty to teach these courses, and about the receptivity of students and the challenges this can create in the classroom. What strikes me as I learn from students and faculty about their experiences, is that they often reflect the same concerns and the same frustrations.

So let's take stock and take action. We are an academic community and we understand the need for assessment and continuous improvement. When there is a need or an opportunity for improvement, we take steps to understand, we hone our analysis, we come together, we reaffirm our commitment, we bear down, lean in, and step up, and we try to do better. Our work around diversity and inclusion is no different, because we are committed to each as ideals for our university. If any of the D1/D2 courses – or sequence, or strategy, or delivery, or outcomes – are not working right for us, let's take time to reflect and assess, and commit to improving them.

And know that this is a moving target, and that's OK. There is no end-point, terminus, or goalpost. This is not a destination we must reach – some point of pure enlightenment or perfect justice – this is a *journey*.

We are on a path. And as long we stay on the path, commit to the journey, and do so with open eyes, open minds, and open hearts, we are on the right path. As scholars, we are seekers of knowledge and truth. As educators, we trade in learning and discovery. And as members of the UVM academic community, we are committed to diversity and inclusion – as beacons, as pillars, as core values, as foundational principles, and as aspirational ideals. This, as I have written on many occasions, is what makes a great university.

Second, I want to speak to culture within the colleges and schools, whether in the classrooms, the departments, the student services offices, or the student organizations.

When we hear any members or groups in our academic community feel disenfranchised (whether students, faculty, or staff), we must pay attention. This is especially true when students report incidents of racism or micro-aggressions in the classroom. We have a duty to support students and faculty to ensure an inclusive classroom and learning environment. To this end, faculty training and professional development opportunities exist and continue to expand – but these mean nothing without your attendance and engagement. (This is very similar to my remarks at Convocation each fall,

where I point students to the myriad opportunities they will have available to them. We can open the doors but it is their responsibility to walk through, to take full advantage of all that we offer, and to make the most of their four undergraduate years at UVM.) We can create the opportunities to become the best faculty members you can be, but only you can decide to attend and participate.

Just as I challenge the deans to create opportunities in their colleges and schools for faculty to engage and share best practices, scholarship, and pedagogy around diversity and inclusion, I also challenge the deans to increase, and where necessary incentivize, attendance in faculty development sessions, especially offerings that push us toward more inclusive classrooms. Deans must set not only the tone, but the expectations. They must model not only the commitment, but the learning.

Finally, as provost, I want to offer specific commitments – to complement the challenges I have just issued but also to underscore my personal commitment to diversity and inclusion and to making our university the best it can be.

I will partner with the Faculty Senate to review the diversity general education requirement, to make recommendations to improve the offerings and the outcomes, and to implement those recommendations that have the broadest support and the greatest potential for improvement.

I will ask the deans to take specific and actionable steps to improve the climates within their colleges and schools. This includes ensuring faculty have the support and the professional development needed to effectively instruct and guide discussions through difficult topics, and manage charged classrooms and interactions among students; ensuring students have access to college leadership when they want to report a concern; ensuring faculty search committees develop pools of diverse, high quality applicants from which to build a diverse, high quality faculty; ensuring diverse faculty *and* professional staff needs are heard, and are met with specific, authentic, and sustainable responses; and providing regular diversity training to all faculty and student services staff.

Much of this is available, of course, through HRDMA. And the recently created “Framework for Inclusive Excellence” provides a great roadmap, developed in collaboration with the President’s Commission for Inclusive Excellence (PCIE) and President Sullivan. I want to add my thanks to all of the colleges and schools, as well as each of the administrative units, for completing and submitting their frameworks this spring. Please don’t put them on the shelf. Make them a part of your leadership strategy, plans, and commitments. I will be making the Framework part of my strategy working with the Deans and Vice Presidents.

Third and finally, **I will** actively connect with more faculty, staff, and students around the specific topics of diversity and inclusion – not only to listen and hear their thoughts and concerns, but to understand their needs and their hopes, and to hear their ideas and their aspirations. This can only help me to better serve the University in my role as chief academic officer. It can only make me a better provost.

Commitment is easier than action – but both are necessary. Diversity and inclusion are not substitutes for academic quality and scholarship, but they are inextricably linked.

If you doubt any of this, or if you are not yet fully committed to this work, I would simply ask that you trust those of us who are. We are on a good path, and a great journey. We are trying, we are learning, and we are growing. We will continue to try, and we will continue to learn, and in doing so we will continue to grow.

I believe this important work we undertake together – this journey – will make our fabric stronger, our tapestry richer, our discovery deeper, and our mosaic more brilliant.

These are words I often closed remarks with when I was a dean. “Trust one another, and expect great things. You will not be disappointed.” President Sullivan has similar words he often closes his remarks with. Such remarks come from our hearts. We *believe* in what we say, we believe in what we are doing, we believe in this great university, and we believe in each of you.

Thank you.

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