



## ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE GOALS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT: 2018 UPDATE

D. Rosowsky, Ph.D., Provost and Senior Vice President

“During President Sullivan’s installation speech in fall 2012, he outlined his *Strategic Action Plan* for the University of Vermont. The Plan was discussed by the Board of Trustees in several meetings in 2012, and was approved by the Board in 2013. In FY14, a set of *Academic Excellence Goals* was established in support of the *Strategic Action Plan*. The intent of the Academic Excellence Goals is to galvanize the University community around a common set of well-defined objectives, and to “plant a stake in the ground” committing UVM to achieving the highest standards of academic excellence – the highest ideal of any great university.

In defining these eight *Academic Excellence Goals*, we carefully considered our mission as a land-grant university and our role as Vermont’s flagship public research university, our commitment to the principles and content of a liberal education, and our nearly 225-year history as a distinctive and important institution of higher learning. We also considered the challenges facing higher education today and the changes being made by universities to ensure relevancy, sustainability, and a vibrant future.”

D. Rosowsky, Provost and Senior Vice President  
*Academic Excellence Goals Narrative*, September 2014

### INTRODUCTION

During the fall 2018 semester, a review of progress against specific [Academic Excellence Goals](#) was conducted. The *Academic Excellence Goals* were developed by the Provost in early 2014 to both undergird (support) and animate (realize) the priorities articulated in the [President’s Strategic Action Plan](#). The *Academic Excellence Goals* were accompanied by the [Academic Excellence Goals Narrative](#) that provided information about the bases for the articulated goals, timelines, mechanisms and strategies to achieve them, and specific metrics for tracking and reporting progress. The Provost reported progress regularly to the campus (through [Across the Green](#) memos, campus-wide leadership meetings, and other invited presentations), the Faculty Senate, and the Board of Trustees.

The goals of this review and reaffirmation of the *Academic Excellence Goals* were (1) to assess and report progress toward articulated goals, (2) to modify goals and/or strategies in cases where goals have not yet been achieved, and (3) to identify possible additional goals that may be appropriate as we prepare for a presidential transition and possible refresh of the *Strategic Action Plan*.

## **SUMMARY OF PROGRESS BY ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE GOAL (AEG), FY14-18**

**AEG 1: Increase the percentage of undergraduate students graduating in four years**

Progress: Increased from 61.7% to 63.6%

National average: 35% (public), 70% (private)

Goal: 70%

**AEG 2: Improve undergraduate student retention**

Progress: Increased from 86% to 88%

National average: 82% (public), 93% (private)

Goal: 90%

**AEG 3: Improve student advising, both academic and pre-professional/career**

*Metric: students reporting to NSSE that their UVM experience contributed “quite a bit” or “very much” to their job and work-related skills and knowledge*

Progress: Increased from 60% to 62%

National average: 65%

Goal: 70%

**AEG 4: Increase interdisciplinary teaching, research, and scholarship**

Progress: Significant growth in number of new academic programs developed/approved, new cross-college proposals submitted/funded, and activity in pan-university research and scholarship endeavors such as the Gund Institute for Environment, the Humanities Center, and the MassMutual Center of Excellence in Data Sciences and Complex Systems. This is reported in more depth in various annual updates (e.g., annual update of the [University-Wide Indicators of Success](#)) and communications to the campus (e.g., [Across the Green](#)).

**AEG 5: Expand programmatic offerings to include distance and hybrid modes of instructional delivery**

Progress: Total annual enrollment in online/hybrid courses increased from 4660 students to 12,667 students, a nearly 300% increase.

**AEG 6: Increase research and scholarship in areas that generate high impact, recognition, and visibility**

Progress: Increased from \$106M (FY13) to \$132M (FY15), \$138M (FY16), \$123M (FY17), and \$136M (FY18); increased number of large (>\$1M) grants; launched several new centers and institutes with extramural funding; invested strategically in several high potential/high impact areas in the form of seed grants, equipment support, and matching funds; dramatically increased placement of stories highlighting research in regional and national media outlets.

Goal: Increase annual sponsored project awards to above \$130M consistently

**AEG 7: Increase domestic diversity and grow international student enrollments**

Progress: Domestic diversity among our undergraduate population has remained at 11-12% over this period. Percentage of international undergraduate students has grown from 2.0% to 5.5%. Percentage of international graduate/professional/medical students has held steady at 7-8% over this period.  
Goal: Increase domestic diversity, grow to 7-10% international students

**AEG 8: Increase enrollments in graduate and professional programs**

Progress: Total number of graduate students increased from 1806 to 2001 (10% increase), during a period in which the total undergraduate student number increased from 9970 to 10,513 (5%), reducing the UG/G ratio from 5.5 to 5.25. The strategic growth in graduate enrollments and new graduate programs is described in various annual updates (e.g., annual update of the [University-Wide Indicators of Success](#)) and communications to the campus (e.g., [Across the Green](#)).  
Goal: Undergraduate-to-graduate ratio of 4.5:1

## **REFLECTIONS ON PROGRESS**

**AEG 1 (Four-year graduation):** Making progress. We can continue to push this percentage upward. But we already are quite high given our mix of in-state and out-of-state students. Given our mix, we should be at 61-62%. While we are already above that percentage, having improved to nearly 64%, our comparator average is 70% and this must be our goal. Our six-year graduation rate also has improved during this period, from 74% to 76%. New commitments to academic advising including implementation of the [EAB Navigate](#) platform are expected to continue to increase our graduation rates.

**AEG 2 (Student retention):** Making progress. We have made progress toward our goal of 90% and must continue to maintain this goal for reasons that are now well understood across the campus, and articulated in the 2018 [Student Retention Action Plan](#) which is driving our efforts and our progress. New commitments to academic advising including implementation of the [EAB Navigate](#) platform are expected to continue to increase our retention rates.

**AEG 3 (Advising, academic and pre-career):** Modest progress only. We must maintain this 70% goal. Of concern is the continued disconnect between the levels of satisfaction reported by our students in other parts of the NSSE survey and responses to this particular question. We should think about our own messaging to students around career-readiness and how we can best prepare them to respond to these types of questions. That said, the data suggest we can (and should) improve our efforts around preparing students for careers.

**AEG 4 (Interdisciplinarity):** Excellent progress. All indicators point to increased, and growing, interdisciplinary activity (teaching, research, and scholarship) across the University. Several exciting and promising new interdisciplinary academic programs have been launched in the last two years, with more expected in the years ahead. There is clear energy and momentum throughout the University for such activities.

AEG 5 (Distance education): Excellent progress. All indicators point to increased and growing, online and hybrid academic offerings. These new and expanded offerings are serving multiple strategic objectives: (1) reach new audiences, (2) help our undergraduate students make timely progression and complete their degree requirements on-time, and (3) provide additional flexibility to graduate students.

AEG 6 (Research): Good progress, perhaps hindered by the changes in the federal research funding landscape. That said, we continue to grow our research enterprise in strategic areas for the University.

AEG 7 (Diversity): Limited progress to-date. We must continue to work to increase the percentage of UG students from diverse groups. We have several initiatives underway to help us further our recruiting efforts in this area. Our international student numbers, both UG and G, are quite likely to decline given the current climate and US position on visas, etc. This is something being experienced by all US colleges and universities.

AEG 8 (Graduate enrollment): Making progress. We have made good progress and should continue to grow graduate enrollments, strategically, in select parts of the University. The colleges and schools are deeply engaged in this effort now.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of this review/assessment, and the continued relevance of the eight *Academic Excellence Goals* going forward, it is recommended that these remain our goals and that we continue to focus our efforts on achieving them in the next 3-4 years, using the strategies identified in 2014. At that point, a review should be undertaken to either modify the targets or the goals, as appropriate. For the reasons articulated in the original [Academic Excellence Goals Narrative](#), continued progress against these goals will drive all indicators of success: student quality, student access and student success; diversity; visibility and rankings; scholarly productivity and impact, alumni engagement, global reach and global impact, faculty recruitment, institutional innovation, capital project planning, and financial stability and security.

Specific recommendations:

1. Ensure successful implementation of EAB Navigate; closely monitor progress toward broad adoption and effective utilization; take corrective actions quickly when needed; provide necessary support for students, faculty, and staff
2. Review effectiveness and implement changes to improve university and unit-level career readiness programs

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