



Across the Green
January 2018

TO: University of Vermont Academic Community
FROM: David V. Rosowsky, Provost and Senior Vice President

“Age of Disruption”

INTRODUCTION

We are, without question, operating in one of the most challenging, rapidly changing, and also hopeful times for US higher education. Such a bold statement demands, and deserves, some explanation. The challenges facing US higher education writ large, and public higher education in particular, should be well known to all of us. We have watched as both costs and expectations have risen while public support has declined. We have seen the popularity of traditional college majors ebb and flow, while new fields of study and entirely new disciplines have evolved, demanding new resources and new expertise. We have seen our traditional student markets decline, while we all compete for elusive new geographic markets (both domestic and international) and non-traditional (fast becoming “new traditional”) students. We are doing more with less, reaching farther away from our traditional and comfortable campus boundaries, and having to compete for resources, rankings, and talent with institutions that are, like us, becoming more sophisticated and more strategic.

Students turn over and are evolving faster, as a group, than faculty. Campus facilities are struggling to keep up with both. Investments in student services, IT infrastructure, health and wellness, and core research facilities are demanding increasing percentages of the budget. And we are becoming more dependent on graduate and professional degree tuition revenue, research indirect, private and corporate philanthropy, and non-degree activities to generate the revenue needed, not only to meet expenses, but to invest in our faculty, facilities, programming, and campus.

And there is the national political landscape that seems to be strengthening and in some cases creating divisions. We are a nation increasingly divided, exhibiting little respect for and even less confidence in our leaders, and (it seems) increasingly willing to ignore facts and accept falsehoods. Civil discourse is being replaced by angry, divisive partisanship and ideology. Science is invoked inconsistently and understood even less. The ubiquitous nature of and access to information (true and false, complete and partial) has made it easy to bolster one’s position without having to acknowledge the existence of contradictory viewpoints or even ideas. We are relocating to the extremes where it is simpler, more absolute, and cleaner; rather than the more moderate middle where it more complicated, more nuanced, and often messier. We have become

a nation of absolute positions rather than one built on dialog and debate, thoughtful discourse, and inclusion of ideas. We choose to dig in rather than engage in discourse that might expand our thinking. We are less receptive to such expansion. We choose to stand with people that look like us, sound like us, think like us, and believe what we believe. We choose our media and news outlets similarly. It is hard to aspire to be truly inclusive when we are increasingly partisan, divided, ideologically focused, or intellectually isolated.

America's colleges and universities, long the envy of the world – though, like much of our nation, facing challenges to our long held dominance – are structured as communities for expansive learning, are creating new knowledge, and are leading the way in scientific advances, and driving social innovation, equity, and justice. But they are also accused of being too liberal¹, indoctrinating our students rather than truly educating them, and shielding them from disparate viewpoints. We are being accused of pandering to students, being overly solicitous and overly accommodating, and failing to prepare students for “the real world.” Coupled with the increased scrutiny on the value of higher education, rising costs to families (largely a result of decreased state support, but also driven by increased federal compliance mandates and increased expectations of the university by students and families) and the perception that a college education is not necessary to achieve success, US higher education finds itself at risk of marginalization.

Wow.

So how, after all that, can I assert that this is one of the most hopeful times for US higher education? First, where our nation has faced its greatest challenges, colleges and universities have always come through. Whether with innovation, cure, justice, knowledge, discovery, or mission expansion – America's higher educational institutions have stepped up and delivered. We are technological and social innovators. We are explorers and scientists. We are artists and educators. Social movements take root and thrive on our campuses before moving out into the broader society. Medical discoveries and scientific breakthroughs happen every day at our universities. We model ideals of inclusion and work tirelessly every year to achieve ever higher goals and ever broader scope. We literally created the terms interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, service learning, and flipped classroom. And all of this during a long period of decreasing state support, escalating costs, and unfunded federal mandates. We have never thrown in the towel. We persevered and we innovated. We adapted and we thrived.

My vision for the University of Vermont is that we continue to be a leader in higher education, a model for adaptation and evolution, and an exemplar in delivering a truly liberal education. In the pages ahead, I offer specific strategies and initiatives we are undertaking to achieve this vision. We are not constricted by size or scale, nor by excessive state oversight. We can and should be more nimble and more creative than larger public research universities in our peer and aspirant comparator set. And we can and should be more mission-driven and more socially engaged and connected than our private comparators. We can and should model deep learning,

¹ Liberal education, the cornerstone of American higher education, never referred to the teaching or liberal ideologies, but rather referred to providing students with liberal (broad) education across the disciplines. Liberal education was about learning to learn, to synthesize, to engage in deep learning, to be a complete and learned member of society. It was the ideal of the broadly educated individual capable of functioning as an informed citizen in a democracy. It was not political. It was, in fact, quite practical. It was not ideological, it was idealistic.

discovery, civility, and intellectual discourse – the ideals of liberal education. Now more than ever, great universities should stake their claim, demonstrating relevance, prominence, and impact. The following pages highlight how we are doing this at UVM. Vermont is less about being fearless and boundless than it is about being purposeful and sensible. But that doesn't mean we stand still, ignoring opportunity or need, grounded only in history without an eye or an appetite for what comes next. The University of Vermont should be bold, assertive, forward looking and forward leaning. We can, if we choose, commit to defining liberal education for this and the next generations of learners. This is what I mean by becoming a model for adaptation and evolution and an exemplar in delivering a truly liberal education. John Dewey would be proud.

CAPITAL PROJECT CONSTRUCTION UPDATES

While it almost seems unnecessary to provide periodic updates on campus construction, as one need only walk across our beautiful campus to witness the rapid and exciting progress, I have periodically chosen to use these memos to provide construction updates for two reasons: (1) it allows those who may not travel across all parts of the UVM campus to learn about construction projects elsewhere on campus, and (2) it provides a sense of coherence to the various capital projects that may not be obvious by looking at one project at a time. Indeed the projects weave together a tapestry of priorities, needed upgrades, expansions, and modernizations that span our entire academic community and the infrastructure that undergirds and enables that community.

<u>Academic Building</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Primary Occupant(s)</u>
STEM Complex:		
Votey Renovations	opened summer 2017	CEMS
Discovery Hall	opened summer 2017	CAS (Sciences), CEMS
Innovation Hall	to be completed summer 2019	CAS (Sciences), CEMS
Billings Library Renovations	to be completed summer 2018	CAS (Humanities), Libraries (Special Collections)
Taft School Renovations	to be completed summer 2018	CAS (Arts)
Ifshin Hall	to be completed summer 2018	Grossman (Business)
Bailey-Howe Bridge/Expansion	opened fall 2017	Libraries
Bioscience and Psychological Science/Research Facility	early planning/concept phase	Larner (Medicine, Research) CAS (Psychological Science)
<u>Campus Life Building</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Primary Occupant(s)</u>
Central Campus Res Hall	opened fall 2017	Residential Life, Dining Services
Converse Hall Renovations	to be completed summer 2018	Residential Life
Multi-Purpose Event Center	early planning/design stages	Athletics, Rec Sports, Health and Wellness, Classrooms, Event spaces

You can follow active construction project progress (and find information about delays or disruptions that may arise periodically) at the [Building UVM](#) link on the Office of the Provost website. There you can also find information about the UVM Medical Center's Miller Building, also under construction, as well as recently completed projects including the CALS Miller Research Complex and the new Alumni House and Silver Pavilion. If you have not yet been out to the Miller Research Complex or the beautiful new Alumni House and Silver Pavilion, I encourage you to do so. These are spectacular facilities that offer new opportunities and venues for teaching, learning, discovery, and engagement by students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Please also make a point of visiting the new Central Campus Residence Hall and Dining Facility, Discovery Hall, and the new Bailey-Howe Bridge and library expansion on your next walk through central campus. From there you will also see Ifshin Hall and UVMC's Miller Building rapidly taking shape.

GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES

Our General Education program reflects the faculty's aspirations for all UVM graduates. Over the last five years, we have solidified our University General Education (Gen Ed) requirements. UVM now has four Gen Ed requirements in: (1) Diversity, (2) Writing and Information Literacy, (3) Sustainability, and (4) Quantitative Reasoning. I extend my thanks to the Faculty Senate, its leadership and members for the hard work over several years that went into establishing these four requirements and helping to get them launched. Each has its own history, goal set, and form. And of course each has its own learning outcomes. The time has come for the University to assess each of the four Gen Ed requirements, including how well learning outcomes are (1) communicated to faculty and students, (2) embedded in the curricula, and (3) achieved.

I have asked Brian Reed, Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning, to work closely with the leadership of the Faculty Senate to lay out and conduct a systematic review of our four Gen Ed requirements over the next 2-4 years. The review will include an analysis of how well the Gen Ed learning outcomes are communicated and assessed. The Senate leadership as agreed to start with the Diversity Gen Ed Requirement and is currently undertaking a review of D1 courses.

In addition to the website for the [University Assessment Initiative](#), a new Gen Ed website is expected to launch this month. This new site will provide important information for students and faculty, as well as links to learning outcomes and their assessment. Ongoing assessment and continual improvement are essential at all levels, from specific courses to degree programs, and from departments and programs to colleges and schools. They also underpin processes of accreditation that are required of many of our professional programs as well as UVM's institutional accreditation under the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

NEASC ACCREDITATION SELF-STUDY

Steady progress is being made on the development of our self-study for institutional re-accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The eight standards committees have worked throughout the fall semester gathering and analyzing information to address NEASC's standards. In early December we hosted Pat O'Brien, Senior Vice President at NEASC, for a workshop with the Steering Committee members. Pat presented an overview of NEASC and provided individual consultation sessions with the standards committee co-chairs. The draft self-study report will be synthesized from the committee reports and then vetted for

comment during fall 2018. President Sullivan and I extend our deepest thanks to all who are serving on the various committees. More information about this important university-wide effort can be found on the UVM 2019 NEASC Reaccreditation [webpage](#).

IBB 2.0: PROCESS, TIMELINE, AND EXPECTATIONS

In November we announced that the start of discussions around IBB 2.0 would begin in January 2018, as has been the plan since the launch of IBB three years ago. It was always intended that the budget model would be “evergreen” and that a process of continual assessment and improvement would ensue following its launch. Rather than make major adjustments to the model continuously, it was agreed that the model would run for three years before any significant changes were made. Very minor adjustments, however, were made along the way and have been reported through update memos to the campus (which also were posted on the [IBB](#) webpage) and in *'Across the Green'*.

The IBB 1.0 review and feedback process was conducted in fall 2017 and results are posted on the [IBB](#) webpage. Two other important processes were conducted in advance of the IBB 2.0 discussions: (1) a campus-wide solicitation of nominations for additions to the IBB Steering Committee (who will lead the IBB 2.0 discussions and develop recommendations for modification, augmentation, or enhancement of the model), and (2) a campus-wide call for suggested elements of the model to review, refine, augment, or enhance. The latter will form the basis for the Steering Committee’s deliberations over the coming year.

As was the case for IBB 1.0, I am committed to full transparency and to providing timely, clear, complete, and accurate information to the campus community. The feedback I have received from faculty, staff, students, and administrators has suggested this transparency is greatly appreciated. Recall also that clarity and transparency are among the [Guiding Principles](#) of IBB. The timeline calls for the Steering Committee to complete its work and develop a final, cohesive set of recommendations by December 2018. As was the case for IBB 1.0, these recommendations will be provided to the president for his review and approval. IBB 2.0 will go into effect in July 2019, the start of the 2020 fiscal year. You can follow the progress of the Steering Committee on the [IBB](#) webpage.

The Budget Director (Alberto Citarella), the Vice President for Finance and CFO (Richard Cate), and I remain committed to answering any questions, from any individual or group, at any time. This has been our mantra since we began this process in 2013. To date, we have attended or conducted more than 280 meetings. If your department, program, college or school would like the opportunity to learn more, understand more, or ask questions, please don’t hesitate to contact any of us. If you prefer or if it is easier, you can also reach out to any member of the Steering Committee.

BUDGET CHALLENGES, RESPONSE, PROGRESS

We continue to be in a period of economic challenges from both downward pressures due to federal and state reductions and mandates, and changes in the demographics in Vermont and the broader northeastern United States. Add to that the increased scrutiny and expectations for colleges and universities – particularly public institutions – to do more with less, and we are by some accounts in a “perfect storm.” Higher education is being criticized and challenged at the

same time it being looked to for solutions, cures, access, and economic development. Levels of state support continue to decline, federal programs for student aid as well as federal support for research are under constant scrutiny and threat, and policies are being considered that will have serious and long-lasting impacts on graduate and professional education nationwide.

All that said, I am both proud and humbled by how the University of Vermont has prepared and responded to these challenges, how our University is making strategic decisions that preserve our core mission and invest in our highest priorities, and how we continue the tireless work of seeking efficiencies and increasing effectiveness in all aspects of our operation. We do this, not only because we are frugal northern New Englanders who eschew excess, but because we are each and all deeply committed to UVM and its mission. We value our students and our colleagues, we cherish the opportunity to be part of a great university and community, and we recognize how special a place Vermont is.

We have, and will continue to deploy our resources strategically and responsibly. We must and we will deliver a balanced budget every year. Under the University's budget model, carefully and thoughtfully constructed and implemented several years ago, all revenue flows directly to the colleges and schools and each is responsible for its share of our facilities, student services, central academic services (e.g., IT, Libraries, and Research/Sponsored Programs), and administrative services (e.g., HR, Finance, and Legal) costs as well as its own direct expenses. The colleges and schools, therefore hold both authority over and responsibility for all programmatic and personnel decisions (strategies, investments, reallocations) and associated expenses. As the University is required to deliver a balanced budget each year, so too are the colleges and schools.

The first three years under the new budget model have revealed both successes and ongoing challenges. The budget model, of course, cannot solve the problem of expenses rising faster than revenue. Responsible decision makers (President and Provost, VP's in Enrollment Management and Finance, Vice Provost for Student Affairs, academic deans, and other senior leaders) make strategic decisions that ensure we operate within means and seek, year after year, new ways to both increase revenue and decrease costs. Under the new budget model, and for the first time in the University's history, colleges and schools are now motivated to launch new academic programs, consider new teaching platforms and modalities, and engage new audiences. As all revenue stays with the college (or colleges, in the case of jointly offered programs), there is both direct incentive and obvious ways to track success, impact, and value to achieving the college's strategic goals.

The number and breadth of new academic programs that have been developed, approved, and launched in the last three years is impressive, and has been well documented in several venues (including the Faculty Senate, the Board of Trustees, and several college faculty meetings). But most colleges and schools also have seen revenue growth through new or expanded graduate and professional, pre-college, post-baccalaureate, summer, and online offerings. Most colleges are seeing growth in research (and therefore increased F&A return, nearly all of which goes directly to the college/school under the new budget model).

What challenges remain or are being revealed under the new budget model? Before speaking to those, let me first address statements we often hear about the new model, namely that it has resulted in: (a) a move to larger class sizes, (b) a decrease in interdisciplinary activity, or (c) "course creep" in the form of colleges seeking to offer courses that clearly are more aligned with

another college (e.g., the College of Education and Social Services seeking to instruct their Early Childhood Education students in mathematics, or the College of Arts and Sciences seeking to instruct their Political Science students in statistics).

To the first point, we have and will continue to track the number of classes in each size category (e.g., under 20, 20-50, 50-80, over 80). In the last five years, looking across the University, *there has been no change in the distribution of class sizes*. Colleges are responsible for deciding which courses are best taught as smaller vs. larger sections, and how best to allocate instructional capacity to meet need. UVM's classroom inventory is both finite and largely fixed. We have not added any large classrooms in the last five years. And all midsize and large classrooms are operating at near-maximum capacity and hourly usage. So, while there are always variations within and between colleges, it is not possible for us to see any significant university-wide shift towards large classes.

To the second point, by all conceivable metrics, *interdisciplinary activity at the University has increased, not decreased* since we transitioned to the new budget model. There has been an increase in the number of cross-college courses and programs. There has been an increase in the number of co-taught courses. There has been an increase in the number of large (e.g., center level) interdisciplinary (cross-department and cross-college) grant proposals submitted and funded. There has been an increase in jointly hired faculty across colleges. Finally, there has been an increase in the number of students selecting minors, certificates, or second majors in colleges other than the college of their primary major. One of Guiding Principles of IBB was to increase interdisciplinary activity. It is clear this goal is being met and there is no reason to expect the observed trends to change. Rather, there is an expectation that interdisciplinary activity at the University will continue to grow, enabled (rather than inhibited) by the budget model.

Course creep is one of the "cautions" we were given and told to constantly be on the lookout for by universities that have moved to IBB types of models. About two years ago, under the auspices of the Faculty Senate and the Office of the Provost, the [Educational Stewardship Committee](#) was formed. The original charge and the work of this committee (progress, findings and recommendations, and actions that have resulted) have been reported in '[Across the Green](#)' and posted on the Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning's [website](#). The important work of this committee will continue both as a safeguard and a critical feedback mechanism for the academic leadership and the faculty. Departments, programs, faculty members, and students are welcomed and encouraged to contact the Educational Stewardship Committee directly with any concerns, questions, or observations.

Now let me get back to the challenges that remain or have been revealed in the first three years of IBB. (These are not what I believe will be addressed, necessarily, by the Steering Committee in their discussions around IBB 2.0, as the issues they discuss will only be known after the campus-wide input period has been concluded.) I see two major issues, both of which can be viewed as unrealized opportunity: (1) undergraduate student retention, and (2) continued (national) trends in students' choice of majors.

Under the previous central budget model, colleges and schools had little incentive to retain students. Under IBB, of course, the incentive is clear as all undergraduate tuition revenue (net of financial aid) flows directly to the colleges/schools. My concern, as provost, is not about numbers of students transferring from one major or college to another major or college within UVM – as I

believe students have the right to choose a major and recognize that encouraging units to offer the most compelling majors is good for our students. Rather, my concern is about students choosing to leave the University of Vermont for another institution. Last year, our first-year retention rate was about 86%, meaning that 14% of our first-year students did not return for their second year. While this number is not low relative to national averages for public universities, it is low relative to nearly all of our comparator institutions (public and private). Recall that we established as one of our [Academic Excellence Goals](#) a target of 90% retention. The students we did not retain at UVM this past fall resulted in \$4.2M in lost net tuition revenue. Recall that net tuition revenue flows to the colleges/schools. With nearly 50% of our undergraduate enrollment in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), the lost net tuition revenue to CAS was about \$2M. More importantly, stopping out, dropping out, and transferring negatively impacts a student's progress toward completing a degree, affordability for students and families, and the university's reputation and rankings. Recall that affordability and increased four-year graduate rates are two of the highest priorities in the [President's Strategic Action Plan](#) and the underpinning [Academic Excellence Goals](#). The need for deans and department chairs, faculty, and student services staff to focus on student retention is clear, as is the opportunity for both our students and our academic units.

Finally, the national trend in students' choice of majors (away from some of the traditional liberal arts majors and toward the pre-professional majors), which became most alarming in 2008-09 as the nation slid into recession, has continued. While there is evidence that the trend is reversing nationally, the rebound is not seen in all liberal arts majors or even in all institutions. It appears that those universities that have been most successful in attracting students back to the liberal arts and even growing enrollments have been those that have sought to evolve their programs, add new and perhaps more compelling and relevant majors, and change the way they promote high impact practices (such as internships, undergraduate research, and minors or certificates) and career planning programs. All of our colleges and schools should look to their peers and aspirants to learn from their strategies and successes. The new budget model enables, incentivizes, and (I hope) motivates such curricular innovation and evolution. The College of Arts and Sciences remains at the core of the University of Vermont. A strong and vibrant College of Arts and Sciences is essential to our shared success as a great university. I believe there is also significant opportunity to strengthen and enhance CAS through new strategic partnerships with the other colleges and schools at UVM. Under the new budget model, costs and revenues are shared equitably, fully, and transparently by the colleges participating in any program – whether teaching or research. Students are seeking interdisciplinary programs, courses, and both curricular and co-curricular experiences. Under the new budget model, barriers to such creative and strategic partnerships no longer exist. The only barrier is our own resistance or reluctance. I encourage our colleges and schools to continue to be innovative, to take risks, and to build new partnerships. These first three years under IBB have seen tremendous innovation and success. Imagine where the next three years will take us.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In the previous 'Across the Green' [memo](#), early planning for faculty leadership development programming was described. I have asked Jim Vigoreaux, Associate Provost for [Faculty Affairs](#), to take the lead in developing both a framework and recommendation for included elements with the goal of providing a professional development opportunity for those faculty having interests in academic organizational leadership, whether at the department, college/school, or university

level. There are many outstanding examples of such programs at other universities and from them we are learning about best practices, best strategies for engagement, best content, and best outcomes. If you have specific recommendations or requests for content or timing of such programs, please contact Jim Vigoreaux directly. We look forward to launching this initiative this spring.

STUDENT SUCCESS: RETENTION AND EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH FACULTY

Over the last two years, we have focused on identifying best practices at other universities for student retention, satisfaction, and success. So-called *high impact practices* (a term we have adopted for, among other things, the [EPI Grant program](#) administered by the Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning and elements of the UVM First Year Experience currently under development) include a common first-year experience, residential learning communities, undergraduate research experiences, internships, and study abroad. When looking specifically at student retention from the first to second year, the two most widely cited high impact practices (those that correlate most highly with high retention rates) are (1) a common first-year experience, and (2) engagement with a faculty member within the first six weeks. As the First Year Experience task committee and the Faculty Senate continue their work on the former, I wanted to offer some thoughts on the latter. I offer these comments in the context of our broader discussions, started two years ago and that continue today, around academic advising.

We continue, as a university, to examine the relative merits of faculty advisors, professional advisors, peer advisors, or some strategic combination. We also recognize that there are different academic and professional cultures in each college or school that may suggest one advising strategy may be more effective than another. The dean of each college or school has responsibility for ensuring students receive timely and effective academic advising throughout their respective programs. Each college and school has now reviewed, revised where needed, and reaffirmed their advising procedures and commitment to academic advising, and has posted information on their webpage. Whether faculty advisors or professional advisors are serving in this important role in the students' first year, universities' and national studies have shown unequivocally that students likelihood of retention increases if they have a meaningful experience with a faculty member from their college or school within the first six weeks of their first semester. I have asked each dean to consider whether, how, and how often first-year students are interacting outside of class with a faculty member within the first six weeks, and to take steps necessary to ensure such engagements are taking place.

I also am asking each dean to consider a college-wide social gathering (for faculty, staff, and first-year students and perhaps other student leaders), such as a picnic or barbeque, immediately before the start of the fall semester toward the end of Move-In Weekend. One possibility would be the afternoon prior to Convocation, allowing faculty and staff to remain for the parade down Main Street following the Convocation ceremony. Let's commit to creating more faculty engagement opportunities with our first-year students in that all-important first six-week window.

Student retention is the first, necessary step to ensuring student satisfaction and student success. We all have a role to play in retention, just as we all have a role to play in student progression and four-year graduation. Please engage with your colleagues and your college to be part of moving this important dial – for our current students, our reputation/rankings and hence our

ability to recruit future students, and to our commitment as a great university to access and affordability.

RESEARCH: THINKING BIGGER, BROADER, AND BOLDER

We continue to invest in the research enterprise at UVM. This comes in the form of direct support of faculty research and scholarship, investments in research infrastructure and support systems, cost-sharing on large equipment proposals, support for core facilities, and a range of faculty seed grant and research support programs administered by the [Office of the Vice President for Research](#) (OVPR). The colleges and schools, the OVPR, and the University also invest annually in new faculty startup packages that provide essential and significant support for research and scholarship.

We do this at a time when our own goals for growth in extramural research (see: [Academic Excellence Goals](#)) and the efforts we are making toward those goals are facing challenges from reduced and uncertain funding programs across all federal agencies. Being successful today requires universities to focus on core capabilities, aligning internal support and faculty hiring, and developing strategic partnerships with other universities, research organizations, and industry partners.

We must therefore take stock of our capabilities and partnerships to clearly identify: (1) those areas where UVM is exceptionally well positioned to compete for extramural support and to make significant research and scholarly contributions relative to other universities, and (2) those areas where UVM is well connected to other institutions or organizations where, together, we are exceptionally well positioned to compete for extramural support and make significant research and scholarly contributions. I am working closely with the Vice President for Research and the deans of the colleges and schools to identify, promote, engage, and position those areas to be competitive for extramural funding. Our focus continues to be on engaging broad clusters of faculty and providing support necessary to compete for large center-level grants. Evidence of this support from the OVPR includes new grant writing support (which has led to three funded center grants and two more under review) and direct financial support (in the form of seed and matching funds) for large, multi-investigator, cross-college center grant proposals. This is in addition to our annual strategic investment in the university-wide [Gund Institute for Environment](#) (all of which is supporting faculty research and scholarship), and our efforts to strengthen both corporate and foundation support (working closely with the UVM Foundation).

I believe we must be more intentional, purposeful, strategic, and aggressive in pursuing large center-level grant funding. In addition to asking the deans to make this a priority for their colleges and schools, including providing faculty support to develop competitive and successful proposals, I have asked Richard Galbraith, Vice President for Research, to (a) develop return on investment information on seed grant and research initiation programs administered by the OVPR, (b) consider how best to deploy strategic investment resources under his direction and those administered by the Larner College of Medicine to best support large center-level grant proposals, and (c) identify any additional strategies or resources that would assist faculty groups in developing the most competitive and ultimately successful center-grant proposals.

UVM is a research university and it is imperative that we continue to invest in and support our faculty, programs, and facilities. The [Office of the Provost](#) and the [Office of the Vice President for](#)

[Research](#) have been clear that we wish to support and enable research, scholarship, and creative works. While the levels of funding needed to support faculty scholarship in different disciplines varies widely, our programs to support this work have always extended to all colleges and schools and to all disciplines. We will continue to take a broad view that values all faculty research, scholarship, and creative work, being mindful of where investments are necessary to compete successfully and in a sustainable (ongoing) way for critically needed extramural support for faculty, graduate students and other research personnel, facilities, and equipment. I encourage all faculty to regularly visit the OVPR's [webpage](#) to learn more about the many internal funding opportunities, and to explore opportunities for support of large center grants and other highly collaborative proposals for extramural support.

'IT' MATTERS: THOUGHTS ON UVM'S INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BACKBONE

UVM is a complex teaching and research institution, a public research university, and a major hub for scholarship, innovation, economic development, health care and health services, and the arts for our region and the State of Vermont. Undergirding nearly everything we do as an academic community is our information technology (IT) backbone. Our IT network, infrastructure, and support services make all of our work – teaching, research and scholarship, engagement with students, public outreach, and communication – possible. Faculty, staff, and students count on services that are high-performing, reliable, and secure. Reports of security breaches, fraud, phishing scams, and service disruptions are increasing at colleges and universities, with larger research universities in particular being targeted.

We are completing reviews of our IT infrastructure, network, staffing, and system needs. This comes at a critical time for two reasons: (1) increased and more sophisticated cyberattacks and growing vulnerability to these attacks, and (2) the need to reinvest in our IT infrastructure, much of which is outdated and is no longer able to meet our growing needs and expectations for connectivity and services. Just as we invest in faculty renewal and facility renewal, so too must we invest in our IT infrastructure. In the coming year we will take stock of our current capabilities, vulnerabilities, and needs, and propose a strategy of sequential investments to improve and secure our IT backbone and infrastructure.

A robust and secure IT network, and supporting infrastructure, is a strategic need (priority). It underpins all that we do at the university. Our dependence on this network, the demands we place on it, and our expectations for services, all are expected to continue to grow in the years ahead. As I have indicated on previous occasions, we will use one-time *Strategic Investment Funds* to ensure these investments are able to be made in the coming years.

ACCOLADES

I regularly use these memos to celebrate achievements, recognitions, and awards. Here, I am pleased to share two very special acknowledgements, recognizing of course that there are many more to celebrate each year. First, UVM's [Sustainable Innovation MBA](#) program has been ranked by Princeton Review as the [#1 Green MBA](#) program in the nation. Second, the University of Vermont received the [Prevention Excellence Award](#) from EVERFI this fall, for our leadership in alcohol abuse prevention. It's exciting to be recognized nationally for our disruptive and transformative efforts around innovation, sustainability, and wellness – commitments that connect directly and authentically to *academic excellence* and *student success*.

This fall we also celebrated and recognized [UVM faculty publications and creative works](#) in 2017. These important scholarly contributions span all UVM colleges and schools and all scholarly disciplines, providing clear evidence of the value and importance we place on liberal arts and scientific inquiry. Disciplinary discovery and the dissemination of new knowledge remain the cornerstones of our vibrant academic ecosystem at the University of Vermont, even as we push further ahead in transdisciplinary scholarship and interdisciplinary research.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

We live and work in an age of disruptive change in higher education, some beyond our control and some over which we have direct control. Thus, change is both reactive and proactive. In this memo, I have shared some perspectives and relevant information I hope you find helpful. I do this to place into context the challenges we face as a university and in higher education nationally, but also to offer paths forward that are both promising and (I hope) compelling. I also do this to continue in my efforts to communicate – clearly and completely – on all matters affecting our academic community.

I am often asked about the role of a provost. One of the best descriptions I have seen comes from my colleague Bud Baeslack, Provost and Executive Vice President at Case Western Reserve University: “The provost’s role is fundamentally to lead advancement of the academic mission by enabling the success of others, and increasingly that involves stimulating and supporting collaboration across the campus.”

Advancing the academic mission, enabling the success of others, and stimulating collaboration captures my role at UVM, one in which I am privileged to serve. Working together, with partners across and throughout the University, we are achieving much. I am grateful for these partnerships and to be part of such a vibrant and forward-looking university. As always, I welcome your feedback and suggestions.

GO CATS. -DVR

“Disciplinary discovery and the dissemination of new knowledge are the cornerstones of our vibrant academic ecosystem at the University of Vermont.”

“It’s exciting to be recognized nationally for our disruptive and transformative efforts around innovation, sustainability, and wellness – commitments that connect directly and authentically to academic excellence and student success.”

“The University of Vermont should be bold, assertive, forward looking and forward leaning. We can, if we choose, commit to defining liberal education for this and the next generations of learners. John Dewey would be proud.”

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