



Across the Green
November 2013

TO: University of Vermont Academic Community (Faculty, Staff, and Students)
FROM: David V. Rosowsky

FIRST IMPRESSIONS, OPENING THOUGHTS

As I write this, I am just completing my first 100 days as Provost. I have used these first months to engage with the campus in as many venues as possible, meeting with groups in every College and School, and learning about the University of Vermont, its people and programs. This is indeed a remarkable community.

What I have found in my first months is a campus community that is genuinely engaged and that cares deeply about our shared future as a great university. I have heard concerns, but I have heard far more suggestions for how we can continue to improve and continue to evolve as a modern university. This is a very special academic community, at a unique and important institution, in one of the most beautiful and progressive states in the nation. As a land-grant university, we are part of an extraordinary group of American higher educational institutions. As a public research university, our mission has never been more important, nor have our opportunities been more evident, than they are today.

Many have commented that the University of Vermont is unique, neither public nor private, neither large nor small, neither a liberal arts college nor a truly comprehensive university with a full range of graduate and professional schools. I embrace the notion that we are unique. But as I have said to many of you in our first meetings, being unique is no longer enough in the competitive domain of higher education. We must strive for distinction among a peer set of premier universities. We must measure and report the quality and impact of our programs. And we must be able to clearly demonstrate the value of a University of Vermont education.

The liberal arts have been - and always will be - at the core of our university. And we must preserve the culture and ethos that brought our great university to where it is today. We have a breadth of academic programs found at much larger universities, many of which have considerably greater resources. We must be willing to look critically at our offerings and make decisions about how we might reallocate existing resources and where to invest new resources in order to position UVM to achieve prominence in selected fields, while maintaining the breadth of programs essential for a public university.

We must strive for highly ranked programs in each of our Colleges and Schools. We must nurture our most outstanding programs and ensure they remain highly visible, highly ranked, nationally recognized, and highly competitive for the best students. UVM must become a university of choice, not only for its location, but for the quality and reputation of its academic programs; not only for being a nurturing and supportive community, but for the rigor our faculty instill in their classes; not only for what our students expect of their time at UVM, but for what our faculty expect of our students.

This is an exciting time for the university, with new leadership and what I sense is a widely held sense of optimism on our campus. Faculty and staff, across all parts of the campus, have shared with me their hopes for leadership and vision that will engage and empower the university community, but also make the difficult decisions and invest strategically to move the university forward.

In my dual roles of chief academic officer and chief budget officer, I have promised to maintain open lines of communication, and to be transparent and forthcoming with information. These traits have served me well throughout my career and I sense they will serve me well here. I am data-driven and results-oriented, but promise to be both respectful of and responsive to the many cultures that comprise our great university. I will seek input, work to build consensus, and engage with the academic community authentically.

My hope is to use “Across the Green” as a way to share information about various initiatives in my office with the UVM campus. Here, I provide updates on just a few. More information will follow on these and other initiatives throughout the year. The Provost’s Office webpage (www.uvm.edu/~provost/) is a good place to look for information and updates. We will do our best to keep the content of that website relevant and current.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE GOALS

Last month, I put forth a set of goals intended to animate and support President Sullivan’s *Strategic Action Plan*, and facilitate university-wide discussions, engagement, and initiatives around Academic Excellence¹. These goals fall directly out of the *Strategic Action Plan* and were informed by the many conversations I have had with faculty, staff, students, governance leaders, and alumni over the last three months. Success in achieving against these goals will lead, authentically and in a sustainable way, to increased selectivity, improved student quality, and improvements in national rankings and other reputational indicators. These goals also serve as drivers to the university-wide IBB development process initiated earlier this fall.

BUDGET INITIATIVES

A broad and inclusive group of campus and governance leaders was briefed in mid-October on the evolving FY15 budget for the university. President Sullivan and I met with this group to lay groundwork for what will be important discussions in the months ahead, invite comment and questions, and begin a process of campus-wide engagement to consider the trade-offs (among revenues, costs, and investments) we must make to deliver a structurally balanced budget by May.

In the coming weeks, we will be launching a web portal to receive input and ideas from the campus on the evolving FY15 budget. Complete, up-to-date information on both the FY15 budget and IBB can be found on the Provost’s Office webpage (www.uvm.edu/~provost/).

The IBB effort is well underway now, with nearly 100 members of the university community engaged in committee and subcommittee work to develop key elements of the new budget model. Meetings with constituent groups from all parts of the university have been taking place since our work started in September. The eight subcommittees are on-track to deliver their recommendations to the IBB steering committee by the end of January.

¹ www.uvm.edu/~provost/AE%20Goals%20Oct%202013.pdf

I encourage all of you to follow the efforts and the progress of this important process on the IBB webpage (<http://www.uvm.edu/provost/IBB/>). There will be ample opportunities to provide input as well as feedback on elements of the model as it evolves over the course of this academic year. This is a very exciting undertaking for the university and I have been enormously impressed by the level of energy and enthusiasm members of the UVM community are bringing to this project.

In October, a student reporter from the *Cynic* sent me a list of questions about IBB. I appreciated this opportunity to reflect on these good questions and to provide what I hope was a thoughtful and informative response to each. I believe my responses, and the information contained therein, may be of interest to the broader UVM community. You can find the complete text of that interview on the IBB webpage.²

CREATING AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Last summer, President Sullivan implemented an administrative reorganization to more closely align the academic mission of the university with its student life mission, appointing Annie Stevens as Vice Provost for Student Life. This alignment creates tremendous opportunities for us to think more holistically about the student experience at UVM and how we are preparing our graduates to be successful, competent, happy, productive, responsible, and engaged as citizens and as life-long learners. As I have said in many of my remarks, we must take seriously the responsibility (and opportunity) to program the curricular and the co-curricular time and space at the university, to allow our students the greatest breadth of exploration, and to help them make good choices and good decisions while they are at UVM.

The overarching goal of Student Life is to create an outstanding student experience, and more specifically “to create an experience where students are healthy, engaged, and successful.” Toward this goal, Vice Provost Stevens and her leadership team have identified the following three initiatives: (1) implementation of the Career Success Action Plan³, (2) promote healthy engagement among our students (with special focus this year on reducing high-risk drinking, and strengthening fraternity and sorority life), (3) completing a financial analysis of the Housing Master Plan⁴, and (4) strengthening first-year communities.

A LOOK AHEAD

In my visits with groups across campus, I have been using our time together to talk about the need to demonstrate and ensure academic quality, rigor, and value in our programs. This is especially critical in today’s highly competitive academic market. At UVM, we face growing competition for a diminishing student base in the northeastern United States, and challenges by universities able to offer larger financial aid packages. We must expand our reach to other regions of the US and internationally, and we must demonstrate the value proposition of a UVM education.

I will be working with the academic deans to develop suitable and appropriate metrics (which may be discipline or program-specific) for academic program quality that will enable assessment of progress towards our own goals (both at the program level and at the university level) and allow for robust comparison to peer and aspirant programs.

² www.uvm.edu/provost/IBB/Rosowsky%20Cynic%20IBB%20Q&A.pdf

³ see: www.uvm.edu/~uvmhub/?Page=4yearplan.html

⁴ see: www.uvm.edu/trustees/standing_com/committee_of_the_whole/meetings/2013_feb8_Housing_Master_Plan_Presentation.pdf

Similarly, we must begin to think about how we will measure and track scholarly productivity and impact. Faculty are the life-blood of any great university; they are the reputational drivers. Great universities have great faculty, and great faculty are recognized by their peers for their scholarship and professional contributions.

Scholarship is well understood in academia, even with nuances between disciplines and across colleges. Impact, however, can take many forms (e.g., scientific, economic, political, educational, cultural, artistic, professional, community, etc.). It is my hope that we can engage in meaningful self-reflection and assessment as a collection of academic communities. What we learn can be affirming but can also be eye-opening and, I hope, motivating. As members of a broader scholarly community, we want to be part of the best university possible. Excellence is a shared goal at any great university.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

I am profoundly honored to be serving as your Provost. I look forward to productive discourse, authentic engagement, and working together toward shared goals and shared aspirations. Above all, I look forward to our working together as a Community of Scholars, dedicated to a great future for the University of Vermont.

Our Common Ground provides a noble framework for our work together. I hope you will continue to embrace these principles and use every opportunity for positive and constructive engagement. All of us should reflect periodically on how privileged we are to work at a great university and to be part of a vibrant scholarly community. It is a great privilege indeed.

I wish you all a productive and pleasant remainder of the fall semester.

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