

**Presentation by David Shiman, President of United Academics,
to the UVM Board of Trustees**

October 30, 2010

When I requested time to speak today, I was asked for a title of my presentation. I settled quickly on “The Future of the University,” although I doubt that three minutes provides me with quite enough time to do justice to the topic. Although there are a plethora of concerns that need to be addressed, I decided to concentrate on one: the academic quality of the University and to report to you what we have discovered from a survey conducted by United Academics earlier this fall. We are preparing for negotiations next year and have been trying to sharpen our understanding of faculty and University needs.

You are important decision-makers in terms of determining the direction of the University. I hope that this faculty perspective helps you to find answers to the question, “What sort of university are we creating with our decisions?”

We have seen signs that disturb us. I will point to a few statistics along the way. I could point to others and would be happy to provide you with them if you wish.

First, it must be noted that the share of base budget going to academics has fallen from 51.4% in 2005 to 46.84% in 2010. I understand that most of our peer institutions devote 50 to 55% of their base budgets for this purpose. We need to reverse this direction with increased faculty hiring, greater support for the efforts of those in the library, and enriching a depleted undergraduate curriculum, to name a few.

Let me tell you what our survey reveals and what my colleagues and I are seeing...and experiencing.

As you know, the University has been:

- Admitting more and more students to meet our revenue needs—from 7,806 students in 2002 to 11,012 in 2010—a 42% increase.
- Choosing not to make concomitant increases in the number of faculty to adequately serve these students (NOTE: between 2001 and 2008, the percentage of General Fund faculty only increased by 15%)—in fact, to do so defeats the purpose of using an enrollment strategy to address financial concern.
- Choosing not to adequately fund library, custodial, maintenance, and clerical services and more than decimating the part-time faculty rolls by wiping out about 1/3 of their courses, particularly through Continuing Education.
- In sum, the Administration appears to be leaning much more toward efficiency/cost effectiveness than academic quality as its primary goal.

And what is being said to faculty:

- Push up your class size, from 20 to 25 or 75 to 150 or even 250 and forget about many of those smaller seminars for which UVM had been famous. In fact, UVM now has a policy that states that undergraduate courses must have 15 students or they will be cancelled ... with students stuffed into other courses.
- Take on more advisees.
- Serve on another committee and another.
- Write another grant proposal.
- And, of course, maintain or increase your level of research productivity.

Yet, look at how UVM markets itself to prospective undergraduates. We sing the song of the student-friendly, small university committed to an undergraduate education of quality.

However, there appear to be growing signs that academic quality is deteriorating.

We asked faculty to reflect on instructional changes that have been taking place over the last two years. More than 160 faculty responded to our survey:

I give fewer or shorter writing assignments	45%
I have changed my homework/exam structure	43%
My classes have less discussion and interaction	35%
I have less one-on-one time with students	36%

Source: United Academics Faculty Survey, September 2010
163 faculty responding

Faculty added comments such as the following:

I have had to remove a substantial amount of material from exams.

I no longer give exams that involve writing essays or long/short answers.

I have resorted to multiple choice exams and quickly graded diagrams/concept sketches.

My homework assignments are all one-word or one-sentence answers.

Source: United Academics Faculty Survey, September 2010

These teachers are not happy about what they are doing. They know they can be better.

I wouldn't worry quite as much about these trends if I saw them as temporary, stopgap measures in response to an economic downturn.

But I worry that the University of Vermont—or are we just a university *in* Vermont filled overwhelmingly with students from elsewhere who pay the tuition to pay the bills? (Note: When I came here in 1970, the proportion of in-state to out-of-state students was approximately 65 to 35, but now it is 33 to 67)—is moving down a path that will drain resources from our traditional academic mission, particularly at the undergraduate level, in the name of creating the “premier small research university.”

I call on you to serve as a guardian of academic quality and to promote programs that do not undercut this purpose.

Thank you.