

# The Quality of a UVM Education: Facts about UA's Workload Proposals

United Academics has always been centrally concerned with **academic quality**. UA's full-time bargaining unit has submitted workload proposals that would preserve UVM's relatively **small class sizes** and ensure that students have access to **first-rate tenure track faculty**. Over nine months of negotiating, the administration has dismissed our proposals, choosing not to discuss them seriously with us. Although the administration seems happy to make claims about preserving quality, their response to our proposals would suggest they are unwilling to put their money where their mouth is.

## Class Size

It is well known that smaller classes generally lead to a better educational experience. A better student-teacher ratio also allows students to have more direct contact with individual faculty, allowing students to sometimes participate in research, get more direct help with their careers, and ensure that they will be able to receive recommendations when it comes time to graduate. UVM cannot continue to attract high-tuition-paying out of state students if class sizes continue to rise. UVM's historically smaller class sizes has always been one of its most important attractions, and class size figures in US News and World Report's annual college rankings.

The average class size at UVM has been growing beyond its historical levels every year since 2000-2001. As of 2003-2004 (the last year for which data was available) the average student/faculty ratio in half of UVM's colleges (including the largest College, Arts and Sciences) was above the administration's supposed target maximum of 16:1. This year, we have been unable to promise "TAP" courses (small first year seminars) to every incoming student in the College of Arts and Sciences who wants one. United Academics has proposed to freeze the average class size at UVM at appropriate levels and to improve the student/faculty ratio to 14-1 over the next few years.

## Tenure-Track and Tenured Faculty

Recently, struggling colleges have begun to increase the number of non-tenure track instructional faculty, often part-timers, compared to tenured and tenure-track faculty. Though UVM is not struggling, it seems to want to follow this trend; already, more than a quarter of UVM's faculty are non-tenure-track. This might save money, but it results in the hiring of faculty who are not given the resources or the expectation to do research, and who can be hired and let go at the whim of university administrators. While the part-time unit has offered proposals that would fund professional development for part-time faculty and ensure that they have access to office space and other resources necessary for their work with students, the administration has not shown a commitment to these goals. Our students are not well served by the administration's approach to instruction on the cheap.

United Academics has improved the conditions for full-time non-tenure track faculty at UVM considerably, but we are concerned that UVM may staff the increasing number of classes at UVM with ever-more part-time faculty. We have proposed that UVM increase the percentage of tenure

track faculty on a yearly basis, thereby improving the ratio of tenure-track faculty to non-tenure track faculty.

## **Maintaining Flexibility**

We are not dictating class sizes nor when an instructor may or may not teach a class. We leave those decisions up to traditional administrative mechanisms. Our proposals simply focus on caps in averages across the university. None of our proposals would prevent anyone from teaching a larger class or from hiring non-tenure-track faculty when such actions were desirable and pedagogically justifiable. All we are doing is proposing upper limits. The only reason for UVM to go beyond those limits is to save money in the short term by reducing overall quality of the educational experience at UVM. Unless that is the administration's intention, there is no reason for them not to take our proposals seriously, which to date they have not.