Dear Dr. Garimella,

The XXX [number] signers of this letter, faculty in all UVM’s colleges and schools, wish to alert you to an urgent concern that we believe should top your agenda as you assess the opportunities and challenges lying before you as UVM’s 27th president. While we are all concerned about the demographic, enrollment, and revenue challenges facing the entire university, we are writing with special concern about the crisis unfolding right now in the liberal arts at UVM.

As you know, UVM’s strategic position is very different from Purdue’s. In the hyper-competitive New England college market, we compete heavily with private colleges and small private research universities as well as with publics. Some 68% of our students are non-residents. Nearly 80% of our first-year undergraduates come from out of state; UVM estimates their yearly cost of attendance at $58,540. Out-of-state undergraduate tuition this year provides more than 50% of UVM’s General Fund Revenue Budget. In short, as a tuition-driven institution in a super-competitive region, UVM must produce academic quality commensurate with our high price.

And we are in an academic crisis: the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)—which houses more than 40% of UVM’s undergraduates (enrolling this past fall some 3,000 students more than any of UVM’s other college and schools) and which has long been central to UVM’s standing as a public ivy in the New England tradition--is being hollowed out by an ongoing budgetary squeeze. That squeeze precludes for at least the next five years new hires on vacated tenure-track lines; has required the involuntary non-reappointment of long-term senior lecturers; and is beginning to look at the elimination of majors integral to the liberal arts.

The morale of faculty, staff, and students in CAS has plunged. Knowing how word-of-mouth affects whether students choose UVM or our competitors, you will share our concern: in what will long remain the largest unit in this tuition-driven institution—inevitably the largest, given the capacity-limits on many of our programs in UVM’s other colleges and schools—a downward spiral in CAS in student quality and numbers (requiring ever deeper tuition-discounting, thus further accelerating revenue declines) has the potential to drag down the whole campus.

The University has advanced powerfully in the recent past when senior leaders have committed to investment in units that had long been flagging (in the last two decades, for instance, investment in Engineering and Mathematical Sciences, which was threatened with elimination in the 1990s, and in the Grossman School of Business Administration, which had dwindled to 19 faculty lines by 2002 and which now has close to twice that number to go with its rising rankings and national visibility). Faculty and students in units other than CAS have benefitted from investments spurred and supported by senior leadership. We believe in the practical as well as the philosophical grounds of a “one University” vision, and we believe that for the health of the whole institution it is time to make a similar commitment to the College of Arts and Sciences. We further urge you to assemble a senior leadership team including at the highest levels persons versed in the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences, all of which we believe are essential to the whole fabric of the University and to its appeal to students.

We, faculty representing all of UVM’s academic units, believe that a vital, vibrant liberal arts core is essential to UVM’s long-term strength, reputation, and viability. We are told that there is no alternative to continuing cuts to faculty and programs, but we submit that a better way exists: the restoration of budgetary and academic health to the College of Arts and Sciences, a *sine qua non* for overall institutional well-being. Therefore, we ask you on the threshold of your presidency not only to affirm the value of the liberal arts—as you did in your inspiring vision at last week’s public forum of UVM’s special combination of Land-Grant and liberal arts missions—but also to establish as an urgent, public, accountable priority for your presidency measures to fortify and support the College of Arts and Sciences and the liberal arts foundations of a UVM education. We are fully aware that enrollment declines in CAS have outstripped adjustments in staffing and hence in costs—those hard facts, indeed, constitute not only the budget shortfall but also the basis for our appeal for values-based adjustments to budget protocols that tend to replicate (and even amplify) transient market forces to the detriment of vital, long-term, core academic commitments.

We would appreciate the opportunity to hear your response to our concerns in a timely public forum where we might engage in dialogue. We look forward to your response.