

## **February 16, 2022 United Academics Testimony to Senate Ed Committee on Bill S.248**

I am Eleanor Miller, professor of sociology and president of United Academics. I came to UVM in 2005 to be Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. I served in that role until 2011 when I returned to the faculty. I love my work at UVM. Like my faculty colleagues I am passionate about educating Vermont's college students and thereby contributing to the health and welfare of this great state. I'm here today to ask you to please support S.248.

The state of Vermont sends millions of dollars to UVM every year because our state values public higher education. UVM is our state chartered public university. UVM staff and faculty have first-hand knowledge of the challenges our students confront in securing a higher education in the state. We also know the challenges faculty and staff confront in assuring a positive and successful educational environment. We know these things better than anyone because we live them.

But the current structure of UVM leadership is failing us ALL. The Board of Trustees has shut out the voices of faculty, staff and many students, and there is no opportunity for meaningful participation. Valuable, thoughtful input from these core members of our institution is ignored. UVM should be a thriving institution with world class teaching, research, and education, and high employee and student satisfaction and retention. Change in governance is urgently needed to protect the quality of our institution.

My colleagues in the Faculty Women's Caucus compiled a report based on research they conducted. Their data indicate that UVM women faculty, and in particular faculty of color, do not feel supported at UVM. In fact, more than 72% of respondents rated UVM as fair or poor in equitable treatment of faculty women and BIPOC faculty in terms of "compensation, workload, work assignments, working conditions, service expectations, recognition, evaluations, and promotion." In addition, 81% of respondents rated recent administrative decisions as having a large negative impact on campus climate and working conditions. We know that an intimate knowledge of the conditions that produced these responses could create a radically different environment for educators and students. That report was shared with the Board with not a single response. We can do better.

The sudden closure of the campus childcare center by the administration left hundreds of faculty and community members scrambling to find childcare for their young children. It was devastating for families, and also meant that UVM students studying early education no longer had the important professional development opportunity of working at the center. Distinguished research universities throughout the country have robust support for young families, including a daycare center. Such centers are used to recruit and support first-rate faculty, especially women. They have become an expectation of employment that UVM does not meet. We can do better.

Finally, a stated goal of the UVM administration is attainment of the Research 1 distinction awarded by the Carnegie Foundation to the top doctoral-granting, research universities in the country. UVM has closed departments and programs, left several core departments in the College of Arts and Sciences at the brink of non-viability, and merged others, destroying what was formerly a community of scholars - all with no meaningful input from the faculty involved or governance structures like the Faculty Senate. Carnegie recently released their new rankings. UVM was not among them. Faculty involvement in this initiative across disciplines is critical to the success of this endeavor, but faculty have no avenue for shaping this goal. UVM's tightly-controlled, top-down strategy is not working. We can do better.

The Board's responsibility to facilitate shared governance has broken down under the weight of the insular relationship between it and executive administrators. Faculty Senate representatives have no voting rights and meaningful avenues for input from on-the-ground stakeholders is virtually nonexistent. Faculty and staff are central to carrying out UVM's mission, yet we are ignored and given no opportunity to help shape the future of our institution. UVM can, and should, do better