



To: UVM Campus Community

From: Ron Lumbra, Chair, UVM Board of Trustees

Date: May 29, 2024

RE: President's 5-year Comprehensive Review

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In February 2019, UVM selected Suresh Garimella as its 27th President. President Garimella was chosen for his intellect, his experience, and, most importantly, his vision for how he might use his considerable skills to help UVM realize its full potential. In December 2023, [the Board commenced a comprehensive review](#) of President Garimella's first 5 years in accordance with the [Board's Presidential Review Policy](#). I am pleased to write to you all today to describe and summarize the Board's review of his first 5 years.

As was true for the Board's most recent comprehensive review of President Tom Sullivan in 2017, we again engaged Dr. Carol Cartwright, an experienced former president of two universities, to collect and analyze information from key campus stakeholders. Working directly with me and with five other board members who served as an *ad hoc* committee to shepherd the review, Dr. Cartwright met with nearly 100 people, including students, faculty, staff, current and former senior leaders, alumni, as well as key community, state, and national partners. The Board thanks each of you who took the time to provide input into our review.

On Friday, May 17, the Board met in Executive Session with President Garimella and Dr. Cartwright to discuss the comprehensive review. The Board strongly supports President Garimella and is grateful for his leadership and service to UVM. Below, I provide a summary of the of the key outcomes of the review.

First, the review noted President Garimella's success in clearly articulating a vision for UVM. The campus community is knowledgeable of *Amplifying our Impact* and the strategic imperatives it outlines. Most are familiar with the three broad aims of (1) Ensuring Student Success, (2) Investing in Distinctive Research Strengths, and (3) Fulfilling our Land-Grant Mission. It was noted that other key campus initiatives such as the development of Academic Success Goals and Inclusive Excellence Action Plans flow naturally from and build upon *Amplifying our Impact*, further elaborating and measuring progress toward achieving the vision.

From the Board's perspective, it is critically important to continue to build initiatives around the three strategic imperatives. Doing so will help meet one of the key questions the Board framed in its review: (1) *How can President Garimella and university leadership further articulate how these imperatives directly relate to the work faculty and staff are doing?* and (2) *How will achievement in these areas positively affect students, faculty and, staff?* We have asked that President Garimella focus on building upon the already sound

working relationships between the administration and shared governance groups to develop meaningful answers to these questions.

Second, the review noted the laudable work President Garimella has led in the area of student affordability and accessibility. Keeping tuition flat for as long as possible has had meaningful positive impact on UVM students and their families and has strongly enhanced UVM's reputation. Some worry that the initiative has strained university resources. This worry is compounded by difficulty in easily obtaining financial data and metrics. A large part of the difficulty is attributable to systems and processes that do not promote easy access to data. The Board has asked President Garimella to *develop a plan for prioritizing and implementing systems upgrades and process improvements to enhance financial and workforce communications. Because of budgetary constraints the plan must necessarily set top priorities and include sound communication and change management strategies.*

Third, the review noted the difficulties in addressing the university's diverse array of stakeholders about the issues that impact campus, the state, and the world. Students, faculty, staff, the Board, alumni, parents, donors, and federal, state and industry partners all care deeply about what happens on campus. These groups bring differing viewpoints, perspectives, histories, and objectives to every important issue. The Board understands the importance of clear communication of all decisions and the value of deliberating decisions with shared governance partners to the greatest extent possible.

*The Board has asked President Garimella and his senior leadership team to ensure:*

- *Decisions are made deliberately with as much input from key campus stakeholders as the circumstances permit;*
- *Decisions are communicated clearly by a university leader who understands the decision and is responsible for receiving feedback on the decision's impact (note: it is NOT the Board's expectation that all important decisions are communicated by the President. There are many effective voices on campus and they should be utilized effectively);*
- *The rationale for decisions is described clearly to the greatest possible extent; and*
- *Multiple and effective channels for communicating the decisions are utilized.*

Finally, the review noted the considerable advances accomplished in the area of external relations, both within and beyond the State of Vermont. The Board is extremely pleased with efforts to enhance UVM's reputation around the globe and with government and industry partners. The focus on research and economic development is greatly appreciated and enhances the experience and opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students in all areas of the university.

At the same time, focusing on the needs of Vermont and Vermonters has not taken a back seat. From finding ways to make attendance affordable to redoubling efforts to create and solidify partnerships in all corners of the state, UVM is finding new and creative ways to translate and apply its research innovations. The external relationships are important to

UVM's continued and long-term success. Sustaining this success requires wide and deep adoption and participation from faculty and staff in all corners of the university.

*The Board has asked President Garimella to continue to lead in this area, relying especially on senior leaders like Provost Patricia Prelock and Vice President for Research and Economic Development Kirk Dombrowski, as well as all academic deans to fully engage faculty in these opportunities. It is critically important not only that external partners recognize UVM's value to them but also that UVM faculty, staff, and students recognize the value of these partnerships.*

The Board thanks President Garimella for his vision, his leadership, his resilience during difficult times, and his passion and unwavering commitment to our University. We strongly support President Garimella's vision and are proud of UVM's progress and direction during the first five years. We are extraordinarily excited about the trajectory of the University.

A successful presidency is truly measured by the overall success of the university. Below you will find a summary of how far we have progressed under President Garimella's leadership toward realizing UVM's full potential as a "premier research institution focused on sustainable solutions with local, national, and global applications and impact."

Comment from President Garimella:

*I value the participation of so many members of the UVM community in the review process. Their engagement demonstrates our shared commitment and goals: the continued success and upward trajectory of UVM.*

*I want to extend my appreciation to the Board of Trustees for their partnership and for their confidence in my leadership. Serving as president of UVM is a unique privilege, and I look forward with optimism to the years ahead for our university.*

*Amplifying our Impact: The First Five Years*  
A Summary of Accomplishments Toward Achieving UVM's Strategic Imperatives

**Ensuring Student Success**

- Improved affordability and accessibility by:
  - Establishing a disciplined approach to tuition and fees, including five years of flat tuition
  - Introducing UVM Promise providing tuition and fees for Vermonters from households with below-median incomes
  - Raising nearly \$120 million via the SOAR campaign to ensure student success by supporting financial aid, extracurricular programs, and experiential learning (78.5% of campaign goal)
- Improved campus facilities by completing and initiating multiple capital projects:
  - Catamount Run apartments (>600 beds for grad students, faculty, and staff)
  - Firestone Medical Research Building
  - Music Building Recital Hall renovation
  - Patrick Leahy Building (previously Hills Building) renovation
  - Group fitness and athletic locker rooms and support spaces
  - Research Vessel *Marcelle Melosira*
  - Developed a 10-year Campus Plan to guide future housing and academic capital projects
- Established the inclusive University Diversity Council and achieved significant growth in racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity among new students and significant increases in hiring and retention of faculty of color
- Effectively led the university through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

**Investing in our Distinctive Research Strengths**

- Doubled research funding to more than \$260 million in extramural research support in FY23
- Raised nearly \$140 million via the SOLVE campaign to support research projects aimed at fostering healthy societies and a healthy environment (92.9% of campaign goal)
- Established a consortium with the state and corporate partners for Gallium Nitride technology that earned a federal Tech Hub designation
- Expanded interdisciplinary collaborations by establishing several research centers and institutes, including:
  - Food Systems Research Center
  - Institute for Agroecology
  - Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships
  - Osher Center for Integrative Health
  - Water Resources Institute

**Fulfilling our Land Grant Mission**

- Created an Office of Engagement and the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships expanding university-community partnership opportunities throughout the state
- Successfully advocated for a significant increase in UVM's base appropriation from the State of Vermont
- Secured significant federal funds enabled by Senator Patrick Leahy for university programs