

March 6, 2019

RE: State of Classics at the University of Vermont (UVM)

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

After receiving a number of concerned queries about recent cutbacks to Classics at UVM (*Universitas Viridis Montis*), the department's faculty have composed the following statement:

Jeffrey Henderson and Richard Thomas, conducting our Academic Program Review of 2014–2015, concluded their positive assessment as follows:

The venerable UVM Department of Classics remains solid and strong. It has attracted and retained an accomplished, dedicated, and hard-working faculty whose research, teaching, service, and outreach to the community sustain a tradition of excellence in classics that has brought distinction to the University of Vermont for more than two centuries . . . But this is a department punching above its weight: the current FTE level of 6 + 1 lecturer is only just sufficient to maintain its minimum curricular obligations, which depend on maximal effort from every faculty member and no small resourcefulness in directing their energies. There is neither slack nor capacity for the curricular enhancements that the Department wants to offer and the students deserve. It is therefore essential that the current FTE level be maintained and desirable that it be restored to 7 + 1 . . . Only tenure-stream appointments can maintain the Department's research program and make it an attractive venue for the best faculty; undertake the level of college, university, and professional service expected of the Department; and attract, teach, advise, and look after the career development of top-tier graduate students and undergraduate majors . . . Replacement upon retirement is a highest-priority need [and] should be sought afresh in open discussion with the Academic Programming and Budget Committee and the deans of CAS and the Graduate College.

The very next year (2015–16) Barbara Saylor Rodgers, our tenured ancient historian, embraced a well-earned retirement. The Academic Policy and Budget Committee, in reviewing our recruitment request, declared that Classics was now in “Existential Crisis” and endorsed Saylor Rodger's replacement.

Unfortunately, the Dean of CAS, then in his first year, deferred all new hiring until he felt that he had a better grasp of the College's financial situation. This was also the year that UVM's current administration introduced an Incentive-based Budgeting System (IBB). It was not yet known that this imposed conditions very unfavorable to the College of Arts and Sciences.

The next academic year (2016–17) the Dean determined that only one out of three retirements, College-wide, could be replaced for the foreseeable future. He asked department chairs to formulate a five-year vision of where they would like to be, including what replacements they deemed essential, and which could be foregone in the spirit of pulling together. This onerous exercise resulted in Classics being one of the lucky programs to be approved for hiring—in the second year of a five-year schedule. With this promising prospect, Robert Rodgers followed Barbara into his own long-deferred retirement.

The next Fall (2017), the administration announced that the College of Arts and Sciences had a “structural deficit” of 1 million dollars, newly revealed by IBB. This dismaying figure, after the CAS Chairs met with the Provost in protest, jumped to 4 million dollars the next week—another unwelcome ‘discovery’. The College’s five-year hiring plan was now replaced with a five-years-or-more austerity regime of unreplaced retirements and rolling lecturer terminations.

The ineffectiveness of the Chairs’ united objection engendered a larger wave of faculty activism in Spring 2018, culminating in a Resolution of No Confidence in the Provost, late that term. Former Associate Dean Daniel Krymkowski warned that, if the current administration’s policies and priorities were carried through, the College would be reduced to “a shell of its former self”, with major curricular areas no longer represented. The Board of Trustees promptly reaffirmed its faith in the current regime. And the very next week it was announced that the College of Arts and Sciences had suffered a recruitment shortfall of one-hundred students, leading to a still greater budget challenge. (The College has no direct control over Admissions, which is handled at the University level.)

The CAS Dean, after an agonizing Fall 2018, announced his latest ineluctable cuts. These included Brian Walsh, a much-loved Senior Lecturer of 18 years’ selfless service, repeatedly nominated for teaching awards as he taught the vital lessons of the past to nearly four thousand UVM students. His heavy 4/4 load of all unique preps, many in ancient history, represented 25% of our total remaining teaching capacity. We have thus lost over 40% of our teaching power in the last three years—i.e. 18 courses out of 42 annually.

These depredations have forced us to make some very difficult and unpalatable curricular decisions. First, we have had to forsake our age-long symbiosis with the History Department, for whom we supplied a concise but complete history sequence including not only Greece and Rome but the Ancient Near East and Egypt (the latter two fulfilled a University-wide diversity requirement). This needed three courses a year, but was effectively six different classes, since we alternated late and early periods for Greece and Rome. These subjects, though especially popular with History and Poli-Sci majors, drew students from across the disciplinary spectrum—a great demonstration of how a small department can nevertheless be integral to the larger curricular fabric. The historical foundations of democratic and representative government, the threats, crises, and collapses that such institutions have faced—these vital subjects are now gone. We have also had to sever long-standing interdisciplinary links with Political Science and the Honors College, and abort more recent collaborations with Jewish Studies, Speech and Debate, military veterans, and prison populations.

The alternative to abandoning these important service and outreach courses would be to close our Greek and Latin majors and MA program (our core language sequence needs 18.5 courses per year). This we will never suffer willingly—though of course it is precisely the low-enrolling upper-level language seminars that the administration is eyeing hungrily. All former Deans let our seminars be ‘paid for’ by an array of large service courses, which decades ago we were forward in developing for precisely that reason. But in the dog-eat-dog IBB present, two 200-person classes will always be more ‘efficient’ than one 200-person class and a seminar on Lucretius. Worse still, cutting back our service classes involves us in a death spiral. To the bean-counters we become less

'efficient' than ever as our overall faculty-to-student ratio now declines (hitherto we had the highest of any humanities department, thanks to our service courses). Reduced exposure to the general student body also lessens our ability to recruit for the endangered languages.

It is certainly a bitter irony to watch UVM's administration market our motto, *Studiis et rebus honestis*, while stubbornly ignoring, despite our best efforts, the original Horatian context—an exhortation for the young to learn the lessons of life and leadership contained in classical literature (*Epistles* 1.2).

In sum, while our undergraduate language program still enjoys a vibrant and harmonious student culture (with a very active Classics club, a high proportion of thesis-writers, and many post-graduation success stories in various fields), and while our graduate students continue to secure funded positions in doctoral programs (recently Berkeley, Michigan, Chicago, NYU, BU), our institutional situation has become highly precarious. We are increasingly mired in one-room schoolhouse pedagogical compromises, and free overload teaching as seminars get shifted to independent studies. Even half-year sabbaticals have become hazardous gambles. And our remaining lecturer may well be targeted when her contract comes up for renewal next year.

We therefore invite the Classic community to sign our [Petition to Restore UVM Classics](#).<sup>1</sup> We will present this to the University's incoming president, Suresh Garimella, whom the larger CAS faculty has already beseeched in a collective letter to restore the College of Arts and Sciences to "budgetary and academic health". This is essential (it was argued) for the long-term vitality of the University, despite the current concern of students to follow perceived pre-professional tracks. While Garimella's initial response indicated a willingness to intervene positively, the specific outcome remains to be seen. With this petition we hope to advance our case that the stabilization of Arts and Sciences should include restoring Classics to its 2015 staffing level.

We would also welcome letters of support from individuals and especially professional societies, addressed to "President Suresh Garimella and UVM Board of Trustees". Please send by email to [classics@uvm.edu](mailto:classics@uvm.edu), and/or in hard copy to Chair, UVM Classics, 481 Main St., Burlington VT 05405. We will gather these and present them to the appropriate powers in due course. Letters might touch variously upon:

- the importance of Classics to a liberal arts curriculum generally, and specifically at public universities;
- the value of MA programs as preparation for doctoral work, especially for non-traditional students.
- UVM's long record of public outreach. We just celebrated our 43rd annual Vermont Latin Day, which draws Latin highschool students from all over the state (and sometimes New Hampshire); made national news last year for reading Homer with military veterans; helped launch UVM's new prison-teaching program; and staged a production of Euripides' *Helen*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1wN1GdE5nKzbTeney7Kp3nZCYkFkblKeur8tu-bHFgig/edit#gid=0>

last year that was described as UVM's "biggest humanities outreach effort in thirty years" by Professor William Mierse (Art History).

With deep gratitude both for your support in the present crisis, and for our long professional collaboration.

The Classics Faculty, UVM