

TOM SULLIVAN'S INSTALLATION SPEECH

(As prepared for delivery on October 4, 2012)

Good Afternoon! It is my privilege to join the leaders of this venerable institution and to welcome you here today as the new president of the University of Vermont. Many thanks to everyone for being here today to celebrate with us.

When I was in college contemplating what I would do next in my life, I heard Robert Kennedy speak and his historic words live with me to this day. He observed, "Some people see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say, why not?" And while my intent today is not to dwell on the politics of that time, Kennedy was challenging all of us to lift expectations and aspire to yet unconsidered greatness.

Over the course of my long career in the academy, I have learned how important it is to instill that spirit and drive in the hearts of our students, faculty, and staff. It is part of the reason I am honored and so grateful for this opportunity to serve this beloved institution with all of you and to advance quality and excellence at this crucial juncture in the University's 221 year history.

A large part of our responsibility is to encourage students to stretch their imaginations and push their curiosity beyond "how things are," to raise expectations and aspirations, and to dream the big dream. We need to help them set forth lofty goals, to ask AND answer... "Why not?" We want the UVM experience to inspire in them a lifetime of achievement and contribution. And, we expect our students to make a difference in the lives of others after they graduate.

Together, we can all raise our expectations and aspirations to create an academic experience of the highest quality. In my view, there are four pathways to ensuring success for our students, faculty, and staff – and they all have to do with investing in people.

First we must provide our students access to success through scholarships and financial aid. Affordability must be our top priority!

Second, we must advance academic excellence by rebalancing priorities and investing in this University's strengths to create a distinctive teaching and learning environment.

Third, we must improve facilities and support creative endeavors and breakthrough research for our faculty and staff to attract and retain talent of the highest quality.

Fourth, central to our mission are public service, civic engagement, and outreach throughout Vermont to further economic development, health, civic life, and

environmental sustainability. We seek to inspire students to apply what they learn here and to build vibrant communities wherever they live.

Before I explain why these pathways are absolutely crucial to our success, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to my friends and family who came from near and far to make today's ceremonies so special and especially to my wife Leslie, who is my full partner on this wonderful journey.

I am delighted to have our governor Peter Shumlin and Senator Bernie Sanders here to celebrate with us. It is a special honor to have my dear friend Vice President Walter Mondale here today and my colleagues and friends President emeritus Bob Bruininks and Regents Professor Patricia Hampl from the University of Minnesota.

I am grateful to Rob Cioffi, chair of the Board of Trustees, for his dedicated and long-term guidance and leadership of the University, and the Board of Trustees for their confidence in me and for their careful and loyal attention to the needs of the University. I also want to thank former President Dan Fogel for his visionary leadership and John Bramley for his invaluable stewardship of the University over 20 years and most recently as Interim President.

I want to extend my gratitude to faculty, staff, students, and members of the community – all of you who have given me and Leslie such an enthusiastic welcome and overwhelming support in the first months of my term.

Leslie, as an enthusiastic alumna of UVM, was, of course, a dedicated recruiter and quickly convinced me that this was an exceptional and vibrant campus. I have traveled over 1000 miles of this state and visited 12 of 14 counties since my arrival, and it has become clear to me that UVM is a well-loved institution and for good reasons.

A few weeks ago as the sun set over Lake Champlain, I participated in Convocation's Twilight Ceremony for first year students, and it was truly inspirational. Is there an environment more beautiful or one better suited to learning than this special place? I don't think so.

I have come to learn that not only are faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, and state and community leaders committed, caring stewards of this institution, but you also have the highest regard for what the University can become going forward. I know you, too, are dedicated to promoting the highest standards to ensure quality education, innovative teaching, breakthrough research, and service to the community.

I am asking you to join me on the path to get there.

First, if we are to accomplish our goals, we must provide access to success for all of our students through increased financial aid and scholarships that support a high achieving and diverse student body.

UVM has been recognized as a public ivy. It is a University of independent and passionate thinkers in a distinctive community of engaged learners and distinguished scholars. Our goal is to continue the mission of Justin Morrill, the U.S. Senator from Vermont, when he created the original land-grant statute that established affordable public universities across the country.

Although UVM was a private school for 164 years from 1791 - 1955, it became a land-grant University in 1865. And for the last 57 years, as a University that receives state funding, we have continued the tradition of striving to provide affordable higher education by drawing on both public and private resources.

Since President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act 150 years ago in 1862, more and more Americans have access to higher education. College is no longer the privilege of only the elite. Before World War II only 7.5% of Americans leaving high school went on to college; by October of last year, the national average had increased to 68.3%. In Vermont, however, only 41% of high school seniors go on to college.

We need to encourage qualified students to seek educational training beyond high school, and we need to work closely with middle and high school officials across the state to accomplish this goal. And we must ensure that talented Vermonters graduating from high school can afford this excellent University. We want all of our students to have financial access, so that they can achieve academic success throughout their 4 years here as undergraduates.

Our mission should and must be about access to success for all our students.

Second, in order to create a distinctive teaching and learning environment that advances our students' total academic, cultural, and social experience, we must build on our academic strengths: the liberal arts, the sciences, the environment, and healthcare. That means rebalancing with agility and targeting priorities efficiently and effectively. Choices must be made! Given the constrained resources we live with, we will do our best to make the right choices.

This University offers a rich curriculum from basic science to applied research that enables a practical, but important integration and application of new knowledge and discovery. Our curriculum, which emphasizes liberal education, endows our students with the skills to solve complex contemporary problems over the course of their lifetimes.

The study of the liberal arts is based on free inquiry, open debate, and a culture that encourages the questioning of our most basic assumptions. By definition, a liberal arts education is, in essence, the time tested method of instruction and learning that best

enables us to create, to study, to critique, and to understand knowledge in order to advance society and, ultimately, civilization.

By fostering the passionate and independent-minded spirit of our University community in this special place, we can better prepare our students for the demands of a booming world population, instability in the global marketplace, environmental challenges, rapid technological change, and the need to work closely together with other nations and cultures to solve local as well as global problems.

An exceptional example of a graduate in the liberal arts who has become both a business and a community leader is Alex Wilcox, a political science major and Student Government Associate President from the Class of 1994. Previously, a leading executive at JetBlue, he now has created his own luxury airline, JetSuite. When he was Director of Business Development at JetBlue, he created a program that provided free flights for inner-city students and their families to visit the UVM campus from the Christopher Columbus High School in the Bronx.

This program also prompted JetBlue to contribute \$50,000 annually to UVM in scholarships for students from Christopher Columbus. Alex's contribution is a great example of a liberal arts graduate who, while doing well, is doing good in and for his community.

Next, to improve educational quality and advance academic excellence, we must improve facilities in order to support breakthrough research and creative endeavors for our faculty. Restoring infrastructure will ensure that we continue to be a talent magnet of the highest quality and that our faculty members continue to generate preeminent scholarship and artistic work of major consequence.

We already have top scholars making significant contributions to their fields across campus. For example, Emily Bernard, associate professor in the English Department, has written two seminal books on the Harlem Renaissance, the first of which was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. John Voight, assistant professor in both Mathematics and Statistics and Computer Science, has received a National Science Foundation Career Award for his research in Geometry.

As these scholarly contributions attest, we must invest in faculty research and the restoration of our campus to ensure that our facilities and research infrastructure are first rate, for example, in engineering, science, and medical laboratories. These fields represent great strengths at the University that need immediate attention!

Further, central to our mission is increased public service, civic engagement, and outreach throughout Vermont to further economic development, health, civic life, and environmental sustainability

At UVM teaching, learning, & research are inextricably linked with serving the needs of the state, New England, and the nation as we play a leadership role in helping to solve local, regional, national and international problems. For instance – very importantly – UVM ranks 5th in the country among its cohort universities in producing Peace Corps Volunteers. Over 800 UVM graduates have served in the Peace Corps, and 42 alumni are present members.

UVM is also an integral part of the economic and political ecosystem of Vermont. We look forward to continuing our work with leaders in state government and local business. And we look forward to sharing with the community the good work we are doing from supporting veterans in crisis to teaching local farmers how to build their own websites through the Farm-to-Plate program. We will continue to foster our strong ties with community organizations and state agencies as we coordinate our efforts to serve Vermonters and help invigorate the state economy. Our excellent work in Extension and Continuing Education will continue to enrich these partnerships throughout the state.

In summary, UVM has all of the advantages of a small university with broadly defined emphasis in liberal education; however, and very importantly, we are also the flagship research University of the state. As an institution committed to research and discovery that benefits society for a lifetime, we cannot simply cut costs if we are to achieve relevance, trust, and impact.

In order to be a University of national consequence, we must invest in the future of this institution and the future of our state. As Drew Faust, President of Harvard University, has argued, “A university is not about results in the next quarter... It is about learning that molds a lifetime, learning that transmits the heritage of millennia, learning that shapes the future. A university looks both backwards and forwards in ways that must – that even ought to – conflict with a public’s immediate concerns or demands. Universities make commitments that are timeless, and these investments have yields we cannot predict and often cannot measure.”

Through the primary pathways I have outlined today, we will invest prudently in “learning that shapes the future.” We will provide access to success to students through strategic investments that increase scholarships and financial aid. Specifically, we are developing a new enrollment management plan to ensure the right balance between student enrollment and faculty size at both undergraduate and graduate levels and to achieve the highest quality of learning for our students. This plan will result in lower class size for undergraduate colleges and perhaps higher graduate student enrollment.

We will create a distinctive teaching and learning environment through targeting and rebalancing priorities that advance our students’ total academic, cultural, and social experience. Specifically, we plan to hire faculty in selected departments and colleges where there has been a substantial increase in enrollment to guarantee an even greater quality experience for all of our students. Our goal will be to rebalance our student/faculty ratio and lower the average number of students per class.

We will invest in educational quality by improving facilities and infrastructure for our faculty and by supporting breakthrough research and creative innovation. Finally, we will invest in our community by promoting public service, civic engagement, and outreach across the state.

“And how will we accomplish these ambitious goals?” you might ask.

We are planning a bold, creative, new comprehensive campaign to support these crucial investments and to foster quality and excellence at every opportunity. To be successful we need to continue to work together, listen to each other, learn from each other, and support each other to advance UVM to the next level of excellence and international recognition.

I call on all of us to raise our expectations and aspirations to move this already distinguished University further into the first ranks of higher education. As Robert Kennedy would say, “Why not?”

Thank you all for all that you do for UVM!