December 15, 2020

Dear President Garimella,

I am writing, on behalf of the New England Humanities Consortium (NEHC), of which UVM is a founding member, to protest, in the strongest possible terms, the proposed elimination of and consolidation of several humanities and arts departments at the University of Vermont.

Former President Obama recently noted that the nation is in the midst of an “epistemic crisis”—even as we face a devastating pandemic and unprecedented challenges to our electoral system. We understand that all institutions of higher education face terrible decisions because of the latter two crises.

But we also know that in order to solve the crisis of knowledge and truth eating away at the foundations of our democracy our students—and the public at large—need the lessons we learn from the study of religion, languages, arts, classics and historical preservation. We can’t understand where we come from, what we value, and how we live while ignoring historic foundations, thinkers like Lao Tzu and Plato and knowledge about the politics and wisdom of religious experience. The state of Vermont—indeed the nation—cannot lose current and future voices who reflect these global lessons and the contributions they will make to a more inclusive and diverse workforce. Without them, we are spiritually, intellectually and civically worse off.

As noted, the University of Vermont has been a regional leader in the humanities and a founding member of the NEHC, an active consortium of public and private institutions throughout the region funding humanities research, engaging in public outreach and implementing a Mellon-funded Faculty of Color Working Group. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the
University of Vermont Humanities Center and an undiminished and robust slate of humanities departments at the university.

Therefore, we respectfully implore the University of Vermont to reconsider these proposals.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Lynch  
Director, New England Humanities Consortium  
Director, University of Connecticut Humanities Institute  
Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, University of Connecticut

Darryl Harper  
Director, Center for Humanistic Inquiry, Amherst College

Amanda Anderson  
Director, Cogut Institute for the Humanities, Brown University

Kerill O’Neill  
Director, Center for the Arts and Humanities, Colby College

Rebecca Biron  
Director, The Leslie Center for the Humanities, Dartmouth College

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Co-Directors, Axinn Center for the Humanites at Middlebury College, Middlebury College

Lori Lefkovitz  
Director, Northeastern University Humanities Center, Northeastern University

Alexandra Keller  
Director, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute, Smith College

Kamran Rastegar  
Director, Center for the Humanities at Tufts, Tufts University
Stephen Trzaskoma
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Evelyn Sterne
Director, University of Rhode Island Center for the Humanities, University of Rhode Island

Luis Vivanco
Director, The University of Vermont Humanities Center, University of Vermont

Eve Zimmerman
Director, Wellesley’s Newhouse Center for the Humanities, Wellesley College

Domingo Ledezma & Patrick Johnson
Co-Directors, Wheaton Institute for Interdisciplinary Humanities, Wheaton College