



protecting academic quality

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 10/26/2013

CONTACT: Denise Youngblood, President, United Academics

denise.youngblood@uvm.edu, 802-238-8785

David Feurzeig, United Academics Communication Director

communication@unitedacademics.org 802-656-1498 (w) 802-434-3819 (h)

Visit www.unitedacademics.org/sodexo.html for background information.

**Public Comment to the UVM Board of Trustees
by United Academics President Denise Youngblood
October 26, 2013**

Good morning. I've taught Russian history at UVM for 25 years and am currently the President of United Academics, the faculty union.

In keeping with the ethical principles of Our Common Ground, specifically respect, openness, and justice, over the past month United Academics has spoken out in support of the most marginalized and vulnerable members of our community, our food service workers. True, the food service workers are not employed by UVM, but by the contractor Sodexo. They are, nevertheless, an integral and important part of our community. As food workers, their health and welfare impacts our health and welfare.

Therefore, it came as a shock to learn that Sodexo planned to convert full-time employees to part-time in order to deprive them of health-care benefits. United Academics had previously learned about Sodexo's punitive sick leave policy: more than six days absent a year means automatic termination.

It was clear to us that the time had come to act, to call on President Sullivan to launch an investigation of Sodexo's changes in the terms of employment as provided for in Section 7.2 of UVM's contract with them. It is simply wrong for an institution that prides itself on its commitment to social justice to stand by silently while several hundred of its contract workers are deprived of the basic human right to paid healthcare and paid sick leave. 2,226 faculty, students, staff, and community members have supported the rights of Sodexo workers by signing petitions circulated by United Academics and its partners, Students Stand Up and the Vermont Fair Food Campaign. We present these to you now.

We are cautiously optimistic about President Sullivan's announcement yesterday that due to the university's obligations vis-a-vis the Sodexo contract, Sodexo will not implement the proposed health care changes immediately. We call upon the Administration to use its authority to ensure that Sodexo workers have fair access to paid healthcare benefits and a paid sick-leave policy, just as if they were UVM employees. And we call upon the administration to conduct the next round of contract negotiations with Sodexo or any food service contractor in an open and transparent process that keeps the UVM community fully informed. A contractor that doesn't provide healthcare benefits to its employees has no place at UVM.