



The University of Vermont

*Office of the President*

December 9, 2016

TO: UVM Community  
FROM: Tom Sullivan  
RE: Questions Regarding the Meaning of “Sanctuary Campus”

I would like to share my thoughts about the nationwide discussion regarding the term “sanctuary campus.”

Let me start by emphasizing again UVM’s proactive, assertive, and unwavering commitment to protecting the rights of all of our students, including undocumented students (see, for example, the attached December 6, 2016 statement).

UVM will continue, without exception, to support and protect all students to the maximum extent allowed by the Constitution and federal and state laws. For example:

- UVM admits students without consideration of whether they are documented or undocumented.
- UVM does not inquire about, or keep records of, whether a student is an undocumented immigrant.
- UVM does not and will not create a registry of students based on undocumented status.
- UVM Police, like all other state-authorized law enforcement agents, have no responsibility for enforcing immigration laws. UVM Police do not inquire about immigration status, do not detain individuals based solely on immigration status, do not arrest individuals based on immigration status, and do not disclose information regarding immigration status unless compelled by law to do so.
- UVM protects with vigor the privacy rights of students under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. UVM does not disclose private information about students without appropriate legal process, such as a subpoena or court order.

Second, I would like to address the use of the term “sanctuary campus.” Although I appreciate and respect the intent behind the term, the label “sanctuary campus” is ambiguous and subject to misinterpretation. Moreover, it provides no protection in addition to what UVM currently is doing. Because of that, the term fails to serve well the students for whom the term is meant to provide comfort. Let me explain.

The term “sanctuary campus” has no basis in law. It also is a subjective term open to numerous interpretations. Use of the term “sanctuary campus” would imply incorrectly that UVM has the authority to exempt its campus from federal immigration laws when in fact it has no such authority, nor does any other campus. Similarly, use of the term “sanctuary campus” would imply incorrectly

that UVM offers special protections to undocumented individuals by conveying that the campus is beyond the reach of the law.

The University of Vermont respects and operates under the rule of law, which is the principle that all people and institutions are subject to the laws of the land and lack the authority to pick and choose which laws they will recognize and follow or not. The rule of law is the most important foundation supporting our democracy, without which our form of government could not exist. As such, it would be imprudent for UVM to participate in creating a perception that exceptions to the rule of law may apply.

Given the present extensive and unambiguous protections that are in place at UVM, a designation as a sanctuary campus would provide no new or additional protections to undocumented students. The term would only confuse and be subject to misinterpretation regarding our commitment to all students.

As I have said before, my wish is that we will work proactively together to ensure the safety, wellbeing, and success of all our students, staff, and faculty.