

UVMSU Response to OCR Report

UVM Staff United is committed to respect, justice, and responsibility. These values are included in our contract where the university agrees to work with us “in pursuit of a working environment that is respectful and supportive of employees of diverse identities and lived experiences, including but not limited to spiritual identity, cultural identity or expression, romantic orientation, housing status, political beliefs, level of education and body shape or size.” President Garimella’s response to anti-Jewish bias and behavior at UVM is an egregious failure in this pursuit.

President Garimella sent an email to the entire UVM community in response to the initiation of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) investigation on September 15, 2022. Using hostile language, President Garimella accused the whistleblowers of making false allegations and inflicting harm on the UVM community. Moreover, the email contains serious inaccuracies that mischaracterize the reported incidents and UVM’s handling of those reports.

The OCR completed its investigation and found that “the failure [of the university] to investigate allegations of harassment of which the University had notice may have allowed a hostile environment for some Jewish students to persist at the University.” They also conclude that “the President’s initial letter to the UVM community in response to OCR’s investigation may have perpetuated a hostile environment.” This is a concern validated by the experiences of Jewish students, faculty, and staff whose sense of safety, trust, and belonging at UVM was harmed by President Garimella accusing the complainants of making “false claims,” downplaying the incidents, and misrepresenting the delays and failures to investigate reports of antisemitism.

UVMSU calls on the University administration to implement the OCR Resolution Agreement openly and transparently with input from faculty and staff at UVM. President Garimella must accept responsibility for the harm caused by his response. We urge President Garimella to adhere to Our Common Ground values and to apologize to the students impacted by the incidents investigated in the OCR report and to the broader UVM Community for the harm caused by his misrepresentation of the University’s actions.