



UVM TODAY

Installation Ceremony Makes Garimella Presidency Official



Photo by Sally McCay

With regal marches and a hefty mace, a presidential medallion and the bright silks of regalia, all of the traditions of the academy, the University of Vermont formally installed Suresh Garimella as its 27th president on the afternoon of Thursday, Oct. 3.

UVM faculty, staff and students; alumni; state and national leaders, including Gov. Phil Scott '80 and Sen. Patrick Leahy; and colleagues, friends and family of President Garimella filled Ira Allen Chapel. A succession of speakers offered their views on the mission of higher education—particularly what that means for helping meet the challenges that face contemporary Vermont—and several also shared personal perspectives gained from working with Garimella.

National Science Foundation director and past president of Purdue University France A. Córdoba delivered the installation address. She noted that an interdisciplinary mindset characterized Garimella's approach as he served on her leadership team at Purdue. "This approach is becoming one of the defining characteristics of today's successful and productive endeavors," Córdoba said. "The 'coming together' or 'convergence' of disciplines, of science and humanistic approaches, introduces new perspectives and generates new ways to solve even the most difficult questions."

Other colleagues from his two decades on the faculty at Purdue University spoke to Garimella's professional achievements as a research scientist, teacher, and academic leader, but also his energy, drive, humor, warmth, and caring. "Suresh is delightfully demanding," said Carolyn Woo, Distinguished President's Fellow for Global Development at Purdue. Longtime research collaborator and friend Jayathi Murthy, dean of the Samueli School of Engineering at UCLA, noted Garimella's support for women scientists. "His lab always seems to produce these confident and successful young women who, to this day, will tell you what a phenomenal experience they had in his lab. Suresh's support of diversity is real and comes from deep belief." Poet/Purdue professor emerita of English Marianne Boruch dusted off a phrase with a plain Midwestern ring of truth: "He's a good egg."

After the formal installation—handed the Class of 1927 Memorial Mace by alumni, faculty, staff, student, and board leadership; the President's Medallion placed around his neck by Board Chair David Daigle '89, Garimella delivered his presidential address.

Noting that the lectern he stood behind once belonged to the great John Dewey, UVM Class of 1879, Garimella spoke to the university's place in history as leaders of equality and opportunity in American higher education. He celebrated UVM's land grant heritage and noted that having the desk of Land Grant Act

author Sen. Justin Morrill's in his office "is to me the greatest perk of my position."

The 27th president also touched on more recent history, thanking 26th president Tom Sullivan for the "greatest gift of taking on leadership of a university that is on a great trajectory and brimming with optimism."

Garimella outlined a "three-fold mindset" he sees as charting UVM's way forward. It begins with students. "We all can agree that our most solemn responsibility is to the success of our students," he said, stressing the importance of the highest quality education, mentorship, experiential learning, all critical to preparing for success after graduation. Affordability and accessibility of a UVM education is also central to that success, he added.

Garimella called for enhanced focus on areas where the university traditionally excels, "to double down on strengths UVM is known for and enhance our reputation and renown in these areas and contribute knowledge for the betterment of society and to solve global challenges."

And the third part of the framework is fully embracing and celebrating the land grant mission. "Senator Morrill's land grant vision speaks to our responsibility to bring the significant assets of our university to bear on our community," Garimella said. Turning to the dignitaries assembled behind him on the stage, he caught the eye of Phil Scott and added, "Governor Scott, I sincerely believe that the success of our state is inextricably linked with the success of UVM."

Garimella's address included his recitation of a short poem written by Indian poet and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature Rabindranath Tagore in 1913. Garimella first read and memorized the poem in grade school, and it has remained meaningful to him throughout his life. As he concluded his remarks, UVM's new president led into his final sentiments with a nod to Tagore's opening verse: "I wish for all of us, 'a mind without fear and a head held high' as we work to enable our students' bright future. You have my commitment to contribute all I can in our upcoming journey together."

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