

March 24,2020 Message From Chancellor Spaulding

Dear VSCS Students, Faculty, and Staff,

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve rapidly, the Chancellor's Office and the VSCS presidents have made a series of difficult decisions that will have a great impact on the remainder of the spring 2020 semester. As you know, the United States is now experiencing nationwide community spread of the coronavirus illness, COVID-19. In making the below decisions, the VSCS's first commitment will be to the health and safety of the entire VSCS community—students, staff, and faculty—and our neighboring towns and regions.

Remote instruction to continue through end of semester

Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College will extend remote instruction to the end of the spring 2020 semester. They will not return to face-to-face instruction in April as we had initially hoped. As you know, Community College of Vermont decided to complete the semester using on-line delivery back in the early days of the COVID-19 spreading in Vermont.

We know remote instruction has just begun for most of you, and will begin next week for Vermont Tech students. I greatly appreciate the creativity and dedication of our faculty and staff using tools such as Canvas, Zoom, and Teams to ensure that instruction remains top quality for our students. Our colleges and universities will closely monitor the rollout of this approach and make adjustments as necessary to ensure a meaningful experience for our students.

Residence halls will not reopen this semester

With the decision to continue remote instruction, comes a second action that we are making for the health of all. Like so many other residential institutions in Vermont and across our country, we will not reopen the residence halls at Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester. This decision will aid in preserving the health of our communities and decrease the potential impact on the healthcare systems in our communities.

It is clear that the responsible course of action, in light of how the COVID-19 virus is spreading in our communities, is to have our students leave campus. We understand that some students may not have viable alternatives and your college or university will work with you to provide emergency options for housing in these situations.

All off campus students should also seriously consider returning home as soon as possible. You should know that the Vermont Department of Public Safety and Vermont Emergency Management have made a request that we prepare for the possibility of using one or more of

our residence halls and other facilities at each of our residential campuses to accommodate overflow or surge relating to COVID-19. To the extent we are not using our residential facilities, they can be of critical use to our neighboring communities during this crisis. They need us to help our neighboring communities see the pandemic through.

Retrieving your belongings

For your health and safety and for our role as partners in the State of Vermont, we must ask our member institutions and students to act without delay to arrange removal of belongings from the residence halls, *recognizing that new directives from the Governor or other public health officials may cause any such plans to be altered.*

Details on the process, dates and times for move out and retrieving your belongings will follow from the Department of Residence Life at each institution. We ask that you not return to campus until you have received instructions about the process.

Please be aware that if belongings from residence halls are not removed in a timely fashion, they may be packed up and moved without further permission. Such moving will be at the student's risk.

Refunds for Room and Board

We know the decision to not return to face-to-face, on-campus instruction creates a cascade of further decisions. We recognize decisions around billing and refunds are critically important to our students. We will be doing the following:

- Billing adjustments will be issued for room and board at a pro rata rate, dating back to March 16 for students who vacated their residence hall by this date. Students who remained or remain on campus after March 16 will have their bills adjusted to the date check out was completed.
- Students will receive their adjustment within 90 days of removing their belongings from the residence halls. Should we receive new directives from the Governor, we may need to adjust the timing and criteria for refunds.
- Your college or university will provide information on who to contact with any questions about these adjustments after the adjustment has been made.

Graduation and Commencement Plans

I am sure you have questions about Commencement ceremonies and conferral of degrees. These plans, alternatives, and decisions on graduation and commencement will be determined by your college or university. Stay tuned.

All, we know COVID-19 is creating anxiety for everyone and causing disruption in your routines as students, faculty, and staff. The pandemic is changing our lives in untold ways. The VSCS is committed to bringing as much certainty to your education and life as possible.

Thank you to each of you for your patience and understanding. Thank you to our students for your flexibility and resilience. Thank you to faculty for your very rapid lift to transition to remote instruction. Thank you to staff for remaining dedicated to your work to support the quality education and experiences for our students.

I recognize that we are asking a great deal of you all. COVID-19 is unprecedented and with it come extraordinary decisions for students across Vermont, the United States, and the world.

I expect you will receive additional communications from the president of your college or university.

Take care,

Jeb Spaulding