

April 9, 2020

Dear VSCS Community,

In the midst of this time of near-constant adaptation to the daily changes brought on by the Corona virus/COVID-19 pandemic, I thought it was time for another update. As with so many organizations, we are learning to adapt to the realities of this situation. Social distancing requires remote learning and operations, planning comes with much uncertainty, and our already difficult financial situation is orders of magnitude more complex and severe. These are big challenges for sure, but there are bright spots too. We are stepping up in ways large and small to meet the needs of our students, state and communities, and for that, we should all be proud.

By now, across the VSC System, we've transitioned to remote instruction at all our colleges and universities. I know this has been a heavy lift in less than ideal circumstances, but I've heard encouraging reports of successful transition, brought about with a great deal of innovation, flexibility and understanding during this stressful time. I am grateful for all the hard work our faculty and staff have put in to making remote instruction possible on such a short timeline, and I appreciate the tremendous efforts of our faculty and staff in supporting students and each other through this transition. I am equally grateful to those who are straining to maintain so many of our critical operational functions in this time of crisis.

The spread of the COVID-19 continues to be a growing challenge for the entire State of Vermont and we are helping to respond. All of our VSCS institutions have been coordinating with Vermont Emergency Management and other health officials, offering whatever level of support we can for our neighbors and local communities. Just this past week, Castleton University began working with State officials and the Rutland Regional Medical Center to transform Castleton's Spartan Arena in Rutland into an auxiliary medical facility in preparation for the anticipated surge in patients brought on by the Coronavirus. Other colleges have donated masks and other medical equipment to assist in this battle. These are examples of the value and generosity of our member institutions. I applaud these and other similar efforts being made across the state.

This is certainly a time of great need on many fronts. We are in close contact with State officials and our congressional delegation as they work to craft relief packages designed to mitigate the significant financial burden caused by COVID-19. We are grateful for the support we have received thus far thanks to the efforts of Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders and Congressman Welch through the recently enacted federal CARES Act, which will provide much needed financial assistance to many of our students and to our system. However, we already know this initial assistance will not fully compensate for the magnitude of known and anticipated revenue losses, and much more will be needed from

our federal and state partners, as well as from within our organization, to position us for long term viability.

We are all facing a future of growing challenge and uncertainty. The COVID-19 outbreak and the necessary response have created a huge financial strain on nearly all areas of our economy. The State of Vermont projects an enormous downturn in its tax revenue and has not yet been able to determine the ultimate impact. The VSCS is no different. Our residential campuses, already facing the significant headwinds laid out in our [Serving Vermont's Students by Securing the Future of the Vermont State Colleges System](#) whitepaper last fall, have been particularly hard hit.

While the CARES Act provides a modicum of support in this difficult time, we must continue to explore all options and avenues for addressing our financial realities. Faced with an already difficult budgetary outlook for next year, we now face the most challenging financial period in VSCS history.

But like a long Vermont winter or even a COVID-19 spring, I am confident that we will make it through this difficult time. No doubt, we, as a System, will have to continue to adapt to the forces acting upon us by making sacrifices where necessary and accepting that the future will not merely be a continuation of the past. The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact and changes to our culture and society are accelerating changes the VSCS has already begun with the launch of last fall's whitepaper and the subsequent work of the VSCS Long Range Planning Committee. The VSCS is hard at work examining options to ensure that the VSCS remains a strong and vital higher education resource for those students who depend on us for their education to secure jobs and advance their careers. We will share more information to the best of our ability as this work advances. I also encourage you to check for ongoing COVID-19 updates for your college or university at its website.

I am certain we will be *Vermont Strong* in standing up to this challenge and finding our path through, together, in order to sustain our mission for the benefit of Vermont. Thank you for your strength and commitment in this stressful time.

Very Sincerely,

Jeb Spaulding, Chancellor
Vermont State Colleges System