

The Case For Vermont State Colleges

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The Case for Vermont State Colleges

We stand at a crossroad. Over the past several weeks, the Vermont State Colleges have been under siege by its own managing body. The Chancellor and his Board of Trustees opened up a Pandora's box of shock, dismay, and outrage when then-Chancellor Jeb Spaulding suggested Vermont close three of our five state college campuses. Citing insurmountable economic challenges, the former Chancellor believed the VSCS's salvation would come through shuttering the three northern-most campuses: NVU Lyndon, NVU Johnson, and Vermont Technical College in Randolph. In the span of six weeks, students, faculty, alumni, community members and legislators rallied to express deep concern at this poorly conceived and badly delivered idea. Since then, numerous task forces have developed, many commentaries have been shared with the press, and hundreds of ideas have surfaced on social media and elsewhere in defense and for the preservation of our VSCS.

Why such a vigorous effort? Because the VSCS is a critical life force in Vermont's more rural communities and provides a means to an education for those who may otherwise not pursue one. It matters.

If we were to look squarely at the economic fallout of closing our VSCS, we would see a staggering erosion of the economies of our northern cities and towns. By NVU alone, fully \$113 million dollars is generated annually within these communities because of the presence of the VSC. A college education is more than the acquisition of skills and credentials. It improves quality of life - just like public parks and historic buildings improve community life. These things exist and are preserved at considerable public expense. We should similarly value an educated populace.

Small colleges may be looked upon as part of the state's beneficial physical and human landscape. As you know, Vermont is not simply a geographic and political entity, it's a brand that evokes quality, beauty and enlightened common sense. The existence of small traditional and progressive colleges are part of that brand.

If we consider the socio-economic impact losing any of the colleges would have upon the regions they serve, we would see an irrevocable loss of jobs and sense of community that has been fostered by these institutions for generations. Isn't it, then, more sensible to consider more innovative solutions that engage the communities in the re-imagining of our State Colleges? We think so. And we invite you to join us in the conversation, planning, and future of our VSCS.

On the following pages, you will hear from students, alumni, faculty, and others who are committed to our Vermont State Colleges and why it matters that we sustain them. We are sharing our stories, our concerns, and numerous ideas of HOW we might be able to accomplish a re-imagined VSCS from current students and faculty, from former presidents of these colleges, and from alumni whose relationships with their alma maters span more than 40 years.

At the end of the document, you will find contacts and resources should you wish to join us. We hope you do. If not, please share this with anyone you think might wish to be involved or to know what's at stake.

Thank you.

We Were Cottier Class



The author, age 3, with cousin, brother, and neighbor

As I watch the story of Vermont's State Colleges unfold here in this quiet corner of the state where I live, I am struck by the fact that my home is just a few short miles from where I spent four years of my young adult life exploring

what it meant to be *me* without the restrictions of my upbringing or from within the Catholic school choke-hold – the only educational experience I'd had until that point.

I think about all that's at stake as Vermont navigates the terrain from what once was—and what has been part of our heritage since the state wrote its constitution in 1777—to what may soon remain of our public educational institutions.

We are changing – as we must. But we must not lose sight of or devalue what we already have.

The world is fast-moving; students are challenged by an ever-increasing competitive world and the benefits they must weigh when deciding to what they will commit their hearts and minds. In that equation is the equally serious consideration of the cost/benefit of earning a degree, most often before the age of 22. Young Vermonters must decide if the investment is worth the risk.

In homes where higher education is part of the family history, or where money is not a restriction, the question is not so much *if* but *what*? What will John, Jr. study? Will he attend his mother's alma mater or strike out on his own? What will Mara choose? Arts or Sciences? She's equally talented in both and has her pick of a number of colleges and universities.

Yet in homes where college seems an exotic and mysterious undertaking, where the cost to attain a four-year degree could hobble a family, or where the college-bound young adult has to establish a precarious balance among their abilities, their desires, and what they can and their families can afford; between staying on the farm or leaving the nest altogether—in that, the quest for higher education is a different gamble from those who have the means and legacy to pursue a college education. Yet we evaluate them as one and the same.

They are not.

In Irish history, a distinct class of people were caught up in a similar struggle. The *cottiers* were landless. They were the progeny of poor families, and, while some of those families may have had modest landholdings, all of the property would have been bequeathed to the eldest son. Younger siblings would have had to take their chances elsewhere. For many, that meant emigrating to England, Canada, or the United States, working as laborers, factory workers, or domestic help.

My family were among the exodus of Irish in 1832. Our earliest papers indicate that at least some could read, and, while they toiled for years as “ditch

diggers” by the notes found in family records, they eventually acquired enough money to buy land in West Berkshire, Vermont. Still, none of my relations attended college until my generation.

Of five children, four of us earned bachelor’s degrees; three of these four have master’s degrees. The fifth sibling opted for four years in the Navy.

My siblings include an attorney and college professor; a police officer and high school resource officer; a former Dean of Students and Student Services Director at two of Vermont’s State Colleges; and a successful writer, educator, business owner, and nationally recognized community activist.

Each of us made our own way through college despite having parents who did not understand or embrace the idea of college for us. They weren’t bad parents; they were just not aware of the value of a college education and so didn’t encourage it. All four of us paid our own way through college and graduate school. Three of us received our undergraduate degrees from Johnson State College, one from the University of Vermont. Our youngest brother earned his master’s degree from UVM as well. We are no different from any other first-generation Vermont college student. We just came in at a time when funding was more generous and the cost of education much less. Still, it was a sacrifice and a financial stretch.

And that is why each of us feels it is our duty to speak up for this generation of students—whether they be fresh out of high school or a returning adult who wants to better their opportunities and expand their world through the gift of education.

But the current dilemma of funding our State

Colleges indicates that the state of Vermont doesn’t see the value of higher education the way it once did. For many years now, Vermont State Colleges have been woefully under-funded, so much so that we have earned the dubious distinction of being the second least funded state in the nation for higher education. In a state that is also losing its young adults to other states in significant numbers, it would seem the last thing we would want to do is cut learning opportunities. Worse is for the Chancellor’s office and Board of Trustees to evaluate higher education strictly from a balance sheet, or reduce our colleges to be little more than job training centers.

Our colleges are rich resources for the arts, sciences, environmental studies, health care, and teacher training. They produce engineers and nurses, journalists and farmers, and so much more. They create communities rich in diversity and experiences our rural towns would not otherwise have available. They are places that attract high-quality faculty and staff and provide a focal point for many to live and work and, in significant numbers, to put down permanent roots.

Our Vermont State Colleges are job developers, liaison-builders, and a focal point for learning and community enrichment.

Most significantly to this story is this: our Vermont State Colleges are THE first choice for a higher education for first-generation Vermont college students. So to cut them down, like the branches of a tree, will only stultify the potential of thousands of Vermonters and make wastelands of the communities and people they serve.

On the following pages, you will hear from alumni,

faculty, community partners, and current students whose stories, we hope, will illustrate why we feel so strongly that our Vermont State Colleges need a fresh perspective and review. We are deeply concerned that the State Colleges' Board of Trustees and its current leadership continue to rehash the same top-down style of management that excludes community voice, student voice, and others. We hope you will add your voice. Thank you.

- Mary L. Collins

Johnson State College, BFA in Creative Writing,
Class of 1981



Johnson State College. Class of 1985. Then & Now



The Vermont State College *Mission: One Graduate's Story*

Our mission starts with “For the benefit of Vermont.” The Vermont State Colleges System is deeply rooted in the communities and regions of the state. We educate more Vermonters annually than all the other institutions of higher education in the state combined. We employ thousands of Vermonters, and our campuses and academic centers are centers of academic excellence, culture, and community.

This. This is our mission. First and foremost the purpose of the VSCs is to benefit Vermont – in academic excellence, culture, and community. The question posed is this:

If I were to design a higher education system for the State of Vermont what would it look like?

It would certainly look like a caring, student-centered system of shared learning and teaching through curiosity; success with support and engagement; and progress through seeking out and listening to the voices of students, staff, faculty, and community. Vermont is uniquely poised.

More opportunities are better than fewer when looking at an institution of higher learning. Cutting smaller programs that haven't had the attention and marketing strategy to grow is short sighted. Small programs grow and enhance the campus culture. Too narrow a focus limits who is attracted to an institution and region and narrows the scope of versatility and growth.

In a post-COVID world, traditional and non-traditional degree and non-degree enrollment students are looking for enhancing job skills, completing degrees, looking to transition to new careers – and are more likely to take advantage of opportunities for learning.

Learners are experiencing online fatigue and are taking time to decide on their personal next steps.

Many are stepping back from college, choosing to stay closer to home if learning is going to be remote or if they will be sent home early as the result of a new outbreak. What a great opportunity for our VSCs to attract students in transition – students who are uncertain of their future but want to move forward. This is the time to be bold and forge new paths with attention to what is important. People. Engagement. Cooperation. Lifting everyone up from a situation that has depleted us and rendered us temporarily fractured. COVID-19 is temporary. It did not cause this – but we can and must learn from it.

Investment in people, education, and humanity must be the result.

Instead of consolidating program into one region of Vermont, why not build?

- Forge partnerships with businesses that create direct lines to learning, internships, certificate programs (healthcare, EMT, bricklayer, firefighter, medical coder, funeral director, personal trainer, IT, HVAC, Massage Therapists, Environmental and Health Scientists, etc.) and jobs.

- Reduce the costs in small, strip mall CCV sites, and move those within a reasonable range onto the campuses of NVU Lyndon and Johnson, Vermont Tech, and Castleton.
- Utilize the space and resources of the residential campus to create a hybrid program that allows CCV programs to dovetail with campus-based programs and staff.
- We need well-trained health care providers, engineers, environmental scientists, teachers, poets, and artists for the future.

Build and be ready. Don't shutter and give up. Creativity not cuts.

Each college appeals to the people in their region, while attracting students from across Vermont and from out of state to a campus that provides a world-class education and the attention and developed relationships of an involved and caring faculty and staff. The world is changing around us – there are successes in online learning (ASU and SNHU), and we can learn a lot from them, but let's not forget the importance of in-person learning, ideas exchanges, and the need for human interaction for growth.

In Vermont, PreK–12 public education is remarkable. We have some of the best teachers in the country and our schools are well funded. In Vermont we have an independent approach to what we feel is best for our students, and we support creative, inclusive, and innovative learning environments.

We have high aspiration rates for post-secondary education. And then we drop the ball.

You know the numbers. And if you don't, they are attached. Higher education in Vermont is under-funded to the exclusion of the students we have so strongly supported. We are failing our students. We encourage them to be college ready, to reach for the stars. We tell them they can be anything they want to be – and that there is a college, technical program, or training for them to create options after high school. And then **we price them out**, we created tuition-dependent post-secondary education that creates an unbearable struggle to repay. We build them up and then push them toward insurmountable debt. Over 63% of Vermont college graduates have to borrow money for college. Their average debt is \$28,860.00. Here are the average family incomes in some Vermont counties in 2019:

- Caledonia County: \$42,999
- Orleans County: \$38,036
- Essex County: \$43,207
- Lamoille County: \$35,972
- Rutland County: \$44,506
- Orange County: \$44,202
- Washington County: \$44,953

The amount of debt students and their families take on to attend their local college is far above a price point they can afford.

It is not easy to commit to college for first-generation, rural, modest-income Vermonters. The most direct line from high school to college is to take a baby step (huge for some) to attend college in

your own back yard. This is a leap of faith—a venture into the unknown, and a risk of money, family resources (if they spend it all on me, they won't have enough for themselves, siblings, etc.), and possibly a prideful step: “who do I think I am to go to college.” These are huge, real risks for students with no guarantee of success or lucrative careers that will pay them back. It is a leap of faith. And there is no net.

| If you ask the majority of these students to consider attending college outside of their neighborhoods—or away from people who get them and “see” them for who they are and all of their colors—they are not likely to attend college at all. The culture outside of their sphere is different and they are not necessarily looking to expand their world—not yet anyway. They do get a taste for the extension of what is possible—remember, baby steps.

We are our stories – here is mine:

It was 40 years ago. A lifetime. But it is with me today as fresh and as clear as if it were happening right now. I stepped into Martinetti Hall on the campus of Johnson State College ready. I wasn't sure for what, but I was ready for something spectacular.

A first-generation college student arriving on campus a full year after her classmates started at UVM, St. Michael's, Champlain, Boston University, Colgate, Lyndon State, Castleton, and others. I never really gave them much of a thought. I didn't know the path to college. I didn't have a grand plan. I just knew that I wanted to go to college, and I had to make the plan on my own. Even my school

counselor told me I should apply to cosmetology school—because “I wasn’t college material.” I remember being a bit non-reactive to that. I wasn’t surprised, but I also didn’t believe her.

So I showed up when I got the letter from Johnson that I was “conditionally accepted” and had to attend a summer PROVE program before I could fully enroll. I was elated! It was a YES to me and my dream. So I arrived—right at the business office at Johnson State with my acceptance—well conditional acceptance—letter in hand. I hadn’t accepted the offer of admission. I was a surprise to them! I wasn’t on any lists; however, nobody batted an eye. I was given a room and classes. I was hand-held through the process but never felt stupid or “less than” anyone else who showed up that day. You can guess why. These were already my people.

Flash forward: I thrived. I continued to thrive for 4 (4 ½ truth be told) more years, attaining the Dean’s List and President’s List repeatedly and holding leadership positions across campus. The President of Johnson was our senior honors suite advisor—because we created it and we asked. Because of the people of JSC and the philosophy of educating Vermonters, I thrived. I could have gone somewhere else, but I never would have found my family, my successes, my confidence and fortitude without that support, those people, at that time.

There are colleges that are “reach” colleges. There are “safety” colleges, and there are “exactly where you should be because it’s family” colleges.

Our state colleges are just that for so many students. They are just the right place.

Look at the demographics of students at the VSCs. Over half of the students in the system are first-generation Vermont students. Nobody does this better for Vermonters in every corner of the state than each regional college in a student’s own neighborhood.

As a Junior, about a month in, I had a knock on my door. I was a Resident Assistant; it was the best way for me to keep my costs down—my parents didn’t understand the importance of completing the FAFSA information. College was my responsibility and my choice. It was on my own or it wasn’t going to happen.

I was being asked to leave campus. I couldn’t pay my bill. I was devastated. A friend of mine said he would ask his father, a physician, to cover my balance and that I could pay him back later. This balance was only around \$800, but I couldn’t pay it. I didn’t have it, and I knew my parents wouldn’t provide it. Over the course of the weekend I packed my room. I didn’t see a way out. I went to the business office the following Monday to see what I could do. I was distraught. I was nervous. But I wasn’t ready to leave. This was now home—my best friends and mentors were there. I was learning; I was successful; I was on my way to being a teacher. I wasn’t ready to give that up. This was my family now.

The Business Manager at the time had me sit down and explain what was going on. He told me to take a deep breath. He then laid out a payment plan for me

over the next semester. I would work my non-work study job, at \$88 every other week, and pay JSC \$50 and keep \$38 for my student teaching gas money. That was it: \$19 per week for me, but I took the deal. He was amazing—and he saved me.

I had the great fortune to see him last Fall, and I thanked him. I got emotional at the sight of him. “You saved me. If not for you I would have been a failed statistic. Thank you.” Unflinching, he said that I wasn’t the only one. I understood then that he saved many. He, without ego or need for glory, saved many of us who were unprepared but determined. These are the people that make up the VSCs. They know who they are working with and for. They understand the students in their care. They themselves are a family. This is why we need all of the Vermont State Colleges. We need their people, their understanding of who we all are, their acceptance to take us as we come and help us become. There are other buildings where learning can happen, but there is no substitute for acceptance, belonging, and understanding. I wouldn’t trade my Johnson experience for anything in the world. It’s here for others now—and they will come and find home here—and we will be there for them. They’re depending on us. My story is only one of thousands. Just ask a student, alum, faculty or staff member—or the business owner who came and stayed. We are peppered all over the state and we found our home here in these small towns of Vermont. This is still the case.

These Vermont State Colleges save people. They save students and communities.

Please, PLEASE don’t let them go away. I can’t imagine our state without them. They are lifelines for communities. Generations of families survive because of them. Seek out innovators and visionaries to revive them. Vermont is made up of innovators—creative solutions—get your hands dirty contributors. We can make it happen. I am willing to help.

My years of working in higher education, family systems, and college and career access and planning have trained me well. I received my Master of Arts degree in Higher Education at Virginia Tech after a few years of working in Admissions and the Alumni Office at Johnson State. I took my love of higher education and access and made it my career. I worked steadily in student life at JSC, VTC, Virginia Tech, Goddard, Pine Ridge School, assisting and supporting families at the Milton Family Community Center, and now at VSAC. My passion is in preparing students for life after high school—after college—and for their right to an education.

- Cathy Printon,
MA, Higher Education/Student Personnel Services
Virginia Tech, Class of 1992.
BA in Special Education, Johnson State College,
Class of 1985



At the request of VSCS Thrive, we reached out to former president Eric Gilbertson for his thoughts about what is happening with the VSCS. Here are his thoughts:

June 3, 2020

Vermont State Colleges

A letter from former Johnson State College president, Eric Gilbertson

Daniel Webster stood before the United States Supreme Court in the case of Dartmouth College vs. Woodward in 1818, and spoke emotionally of his alma mater: “It is Sir, as I have said, a small College. And yet, there are those who love it.” There are good reasons to love our small colleges and there surely are those who love them.

These Vermont State Colleges are uniquely Vermont institutions. They were founded by Vermonters in the mid and late 1800s who promised opportunities for their children and generations of their grandchildren. These colleges have been protected and sustained by Vermonters through good times and bad, through wars and depressions and plagues and, yes, even budget shortfalls. These earlier generations of Vermonters believed that any bright future for their families and their State would need more and better educational opportunities, certainly not less.

Does anyone really believe that any imaginable future for Vermont in the years and decades ahead will need less higher education?

It is worse than merely ironic that at a moment in history when many, including some Vermonters, are arguing for tuition-free higher education at the national level some would now propose limiting higher education access for other Vermonters in their own State.

The Vermont Colleges are, like the State itself, frugal – many believe too frugal. Their costs are, by and measure, anything but extravagant, but even the Vermont virtue of frugality, taken too far, can become short-sighted and self-defeating.

Is all Vermonters want for their youth the cheapest educational opportunities they can scrape together?

Earlier generations of Vermonters had a clearer vision and a willingness to support these Colleges, knowing that they would yield future generations of leaders and citizens capable of serving others. And over these past decades – for more than a Century and a half – these Colleges have, in fact, enabled

Vermonters to become business executives, political leaders and public servants, teachers and technicians, artists and entrepreneurs. Where would Vermont be without them?

And, like Webster, these alumni remember with affection and gratitude what their college experiences have done to mold and shape their careers and their lives.

The current generation of Vermonters – even and especially now in another difficult episode in time – face an opportunity to honor their State's history and help create its better future. The Vermont State Colleges have been born and nurtured throughout that proud history and are essential to that better future. May Vermonters not blow that opportunity and miss this moment.

- Eric Gilbertson
President of Johnson State College (1981-89)

Vermont State 2020 Average Tuition Costs

The average tuition & fees of Vermont colleges is \$13,128 for Vermont residents and \$28,190 for students from other States. Landmark College has the highest (most expensive) tuition & fees as of \$59,100 and Goddard College has the lowest tuition & fees (cheapest) as of \$17,084. For graduate programs, SIT Graduate Institute has the highest (most expensive) graduate tuition & fees as of -\$1 and Saint Michael's College has the lowest graduate tuition & fees (cheapest) as of \$47,045 in Vermont.

Castleton University: Total 2,196 students have enrolled into Castleton University where 1,892 students have enroll into undergraduate programs and 304 students for graduate programs. By gender, 975 male and 1,221 female students are attending Castleton University. Castleton University has much fewer students compared to similar colleges (3,233 students in average - Public Baccalaureate College - Diverse Fields). 53 students are enrolled exclusively and 40 students are enrolled in some online courses at Castleton University

Northern Vermont University: Northern Vermont University is a Public, 4 or more years school located in Johnson, and Lyndon, VT. It is classified as Master's College and University (smaller programs) by Carnegie Classification and its highest level of offering is Master's degree. The 2020 tuition & fees at Northern Vermont University is \$12,422 for Vermont residents and \$26,126 for out-of-state students. 82% of the enrolled undergraduate students have received grant or scholarships and the average aid amount is \$8,350 at Northern Vermont University. The school has a total enrollment of 2,590 and student to faculty ratio is 15 to 1 (6.67%). The average earning after 10 years of graduation is \$35,600. The salary range after graduation from Northern Vermont University varies by field of study and the average salary range \$17,100 to \$38,100.

Vermont Technical College: Vermont Technical College (VTC) is a Public, 4 or more years school located in Randolph, VT. It is classified as Baccalaureate/Associate's College by Carnegie Classification and its highest level of offering is Master's degree. The 2020 tuition & fees at Vermont Technical College is \$15,292 for Vermont residents and \$28,588 for out-of-state students. 61% of the enrolled undergraduate students have received grant or scholarships and the average aid amount is \$6,614 at VTC. The school has a total enrollment of 1,638 and student to faculty ratio is 11 to 1 (9.09%). The average earning after 10 years of graduation is \$45,900. The salary range after graduation from VTC varies by field of study and the average salary range \$31,100 to \$55,800.

- <https://www.collegetuitioncompare.com/state/vermont/>

The View From Here - Faculty Voice



I am not from Vermont; I'm from away, as they say around here—a flatlander. But I have made Vermont my home and raised my daughter here in the Northeast Kingdom. I made Vermont my home because I knew it

was where I wanted to be when I came to college here as an undergraduate. So after spending about a decade in graduate school in Manhattan, I returned to Vermont when the opportunity arose to teach at Lyndon State College. It was, to most of my colleagues and friends in graduate school and after, an odd choice: to leave a teaching job at a major research university working half the teaching load for almost twice the salary. But for me it was an obvious choice, and not just because Vermont is a beautiful place to live.

My education had been a privilege, one I wasn't really even aware of at the time. I went to a private, liberal arts college of my choosing not because of any special merit or abilities, but because it was available to me. Then, largely because of where I'd gone to college (and learned that I loved education), I went to graduate school at a major research university to become a teacher of English literature. As a graduate student and then after I finished my Ph.D., I taught for eight or nine years at Columbia. One of the most important things I learned from that experience was that those (mostly highly privileged) kids really didn't need me; they could pretty much learn what they needed to and make the connections they needed to without my doing

much more than giving them a bit of guidance and a few pushes along the way.

What I learned, in other words, was that there was far greater value and meaning in my working here, at a small, underfunded public college, where I could help deliver the kind of first-rate education I'd had as a privilege to an area and an audience that didn't otherwise have access for whatever reason.

And that is exactly how Peggy Williams, the president at the time, and Jim Doyle and the rest of the English Department articulated the purpose of LSC. So I shaped my entire working life around the idea that every kid deserves the best education we can give them, not some half-baked nonsense that we pass off as what we can “afford.” And here's the thing: there is absolutely nothing special about me; this is how the vast majority of faculty and staff at the colleges see their purpose and mission.

But the greatest value of that sense of mission, purpose, and commitment is, I know from experience, that it is contagious, and it grows exponentially by way of the students we serve. Let me give you just three examples—three (of many) students who came to Lyndon for their education and have in their turn touched more students of their own than I can count.

The first, a traditional college-aged young woman, could have gone anywhere to college and had been accepted by and intended to go to an excellent college out west. But she decided instead to stay close to home, for a variety of reasons, at least to start her college path. But she found what she was

looking for at Lyndon and stayed; she did very well and graduated at the top of her class in English, also completing the requirements for licensure in English secondary education. She taught very successfully at a small independent school in St. Johnsbury, where she made not only a significant mark at her school but also married and started a family here where she grew up herself. Having served her first school and students with dedication and skill, she looked for new challenges and decided to pursue a master's degree. She looked around at various options, any of which she could have chosen, and again found what she was looking for in Lyndon's Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program, where again she was an outstanding contributor to the program. Having finished her master's, she again sought work in her local community, landing a job where she had gone to high school, St. Johnsbury Academy, first as a college counselor and now as an English Department faculty member and a class dean. She is highly valued and superb at her job, and the most important piece, at least as I see it, is that she is giving back exponentially to her Vermont community, and she stayed here because she had the opportunity to get the education at Lyndon, in a strong program with quality faculty, that would allow her to do great work here in Vermont. She demonstrates a joy, a true excitement, in teaching and learning that obviously inspires her students and moves them to do more with their own education. Our community is all the stronger and better because she remained here and dedicates the fruits of her education to all the students she mentors and guides.

The second example first came to Lyndon having graduated from U32 High School; she completed her degree in communications, but she discovered

her true passion in English literature and returned to add a B.A. in English with licensure in secondary education. She, too, graduated at the top of her class and soon demonstrated her abilities as a teacher in several Vermont schools, while also completing an M.A. in English at Middlebury's Bread Loaf School. Then, having moved to the west side of the state, she decided to broaden her perspective further by moving to the wide-open spaces of Montana. Fortunately for us, after several years she returned and now teaches middle and high school in Hardwick. The fortune for us is that she is a master teacher; she completed a rigorous program to become a National Board Certified Teacher, and just this school year she was awarded the Angelo J. Dorta Award for Teaching Excellence by the Vermont NEA. While her awards and credentials are truly impressive, what is most remarkable is how profoundly and comprehensively she touches her students' lives. She works incredibly hard on their behalf, and she strives endlessly to widen their perspective and to engage them in the broader world. Perhaps because she knows well the potential insularity of a rural community, she works tirelessly to remove for her students obstacles to their awareness of and connections to a global community. She inspires her students not only intellectually and academically, but also to be engaged and committed citizens and community members. While her own education has widened her perspective, she has enriched her students' lives in extending that perspective exponentially. And Vermont is clearly the richer for the many hundreds of students she has inspired.

My final example is a young woman who started at Lyndon right out of high school but discovered that she needed to reach out to a wider world and left

before she completed her degree. She left Vermont and pursued a successful career outside our state for a couple of decades. But she returned home to Vermont and, partly by chance, discovered, by taking on a culinary arts course as an interim teacher, that her true passion is teaching. So she made the decision to return to Lyndon, as a semi-affordable and manageable option while she continued working full-time, to complete her B.A. in English, again with licensure in secondary education. Like her peers above, she was a wonderful and inspiring student who took great joy in learning—a joy that she now conveys to her own students. She is exceptionally bright, articulate, engaged, and engaging, and, as with her peers above, I feel very lucky to have had her as a student. It was certainly our good fortune that she made so enormous a change in career and life and that she chose Lyndon because Lyndon was available and flexible enough for her to make that change. But clearly Vermont is more the beneficiary of what she now brings to her own teaching career. One problem exists: she has enrolled in the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies at NVU to further her education and her career, but that program is struggling to provide what she needs given the continuing cuts to the colleges and programs; worse, she risks enrolling in and completing courses in a program and a college that may vanish out from underneath her. It would be sheer folly for the Vermont State Colleges to fail to provide the continuing education for so valuable a teacher, a resource, when that teacher has made considerable sacrifices to return to Vermont and to dedicate her energy, her abilities, and her joy in learning and teaching to the community in which she grew up.

I write of these three not simply because they were fabulous students that I was lucky enough to have during my career and because they enriched my life in immense ways. Rather, I write of them because they are examples of hundreds of students who, in their turn, became teachers in our Vermont schools and have touched in their turn thousands of students and enriched their lives in immense ways. That is an extraordinary return on the very small investment Vermont has made in supporting the college they attended. But without that investment, Lyndon would not have been there for these women to choose, and they might never have had the chance to commit their remarkable talents to communities, schools, and students in Vermont.

They chose to stay or to return to Vermont to teach and live, and we are far the richer for it, not only because they can inspire and guide a new generation of Vermonters, but also because they know and believe in their communities and choose to invest their talents, energies, and time in the communities they know and love.

If we fail to support our colleges and our future teachers (not to mention all the other professions Vermont students pursue) we will have lost the opportunity to retain and benefit from exactly these treasures and all they bring to Vermont.

- Richard Moyer
Professor Emeritus of Humanities,
Part-time Faculty Writing & Literature



In an Ernest Hemingway novel, a character is asked how he went bankrupt. The answer, “Gradually, then suddenly,” could very well apply to our Vermont State College System.

The recent proposed closure of Northern Vermont University, though long in the making, has blindsided many and created an existential threat to rural Vermont. Students who have paid their bills and put their lives into their education are now left to wonder whether their school will exist for them to complete their degrees. Faculty and staff, who have given so much to their students and the communities around them, learned along with the rest of us that their employer was set to be suddenly eliminated.

The proposal has since been withdrawn, and the Vermont State Colleges chancellor who proposed it replaced, but many challenges still face the Vermont State College System. And so far, we have seen little progress from our Legislature in addressing this threat.

While much of what we are struggling through now is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and somewhat unavoidable, there is still much that could have been done to prevent this exercise in brinkmanship. Former Chancellor Jeb Spaulding’s proposal was dangerous — it signaled weakness in the Vermont State Colleges System to prospective students and potential faculty hires, and further imperiled the system — but it was not a surprise to those who have followed the fortunes of the state colleges over the years.

When I was a political science student at what was then Johnson State College, now NVU, I remember attending annual rallies at the Statehouse organized around the demand for increased funding for the state colleges. Back then, we were the state with the second-lowest level of state funding for their public higher education institutions. Now, we have the very undignified position of last place.

I know for many Vermonters, who perceive Vermont as a progressive state, hearing that simple fact is shocking, but it is true.

We have to reverse this trend and make supporting a vibrant, accessible and high-quality higher education system a priority for state government. The Vermont State Colleges System chronic under-funding has downstream impacts that are becoming difficult for us to ignore.

Much attention is paid these days to Vermont’s disturbing demographic trends, telling us that for decades, our working-age populations have been shrinking, while our older population continues to

rise. We are rapidly approaching the day when the cost of services we must provide to those in retirement will overtake the amount our state's economy is capable of generating.

It is in the midst of this reality that we see this counterintuitive proposal to gut our state college system, one of our most effective tools to attract and retain young people in Vermont. If young adults spend their college years in rural Vermont, making personal and professional connections along the way, it is much more likely they will stay after college is done. This helps to grow our rural communities and pay for our services for the most vulnerable.

We need to be finding ways to empower our state colleges to accomplish this goal more effectively, not tearing them down.

It is because of this burning need that I was the first person to sign on to the VSCS Thrive! Legislative Pledge of Support. This pledge, to fight for a doubling of state funding for the state college system, was a no-brainer for me to sign.

As I've been shouting from the rooftops in recent days, Vermont's statute creating the state colleges specifically requires those colleges be funded "in whole or in substantial part" with state appropriations. At our current pitiful state funding level of 17 percent, we are coming nowhere near this statutory obligation.

Beyond that, for the reasons mentioned above, I believe this is an investment in our future that is worth making. We all know that we've had real issues keeping young people in Vermont over the last couple of decades — does anybody else think it's not a coincidence that we've also been severely under-funding our state colleges that entire time? This is unacceptable, and we must use our current budgetary chaos as an opportunity to vocally express that we believe the Vermont State Colleges are worthy of being a priority going forward.

It is exciting to see that a Facebook Group (VSCS Thrive!) of over 10,000 people, including students, faculty, alumni and community members of the colleges, has come together around this issue and loudly shown its support for these rural campuses and the immense value they provide to Vermonters.

I expect that this group will find continued avenues to amplify this very important message. And I can only hope that our legislators and their leadership will hear them.

– Shayne Spence of Johnson
Republican candidate for a Vermont House seat representing
Belvidere, Hyde Park, Johnson and Wolcott.

VSCS Funding Facts

Increasing tuition is directly correlated with declining enrollment.



In 1970, Vermont ranked

3rd

In 2020, Vermont ranks

48th

In just 50 years, Vermont's higher education spending has plummeted to nearly last in the nation.



83% of VSCS students are Vermonters, and 50% are first in their family to attend college.

84% of VSCS graduates stay and work in



Vermont.



Vermont is ranked most expensive in the nation for public college tuition.



NVU contributes \$113 million to northern Vermont's economy alone.



VTC Randolph is a significant economic hub for Central Vermont.



Vermont's State Colleges are one of Vermont's primary economic drivers.



The fastest growing group of college students nationally are 1st generation/low income.



VSCS graduates entering Vermont's workforce expand state tax revenues.



The VSCS attracts many out-of-state students.



100% of Vermont's high growth/high wage jobs by 2028 are expected to require education beyond high school.

Secure the future of Vermont's youth. Help the VSCS thrive.

Visit <https://vscsthive.org/> to get involved.

[Click here to view sources.](#)

Our Vision

Below are ideas for reshaping NVU (and the VSC) for the future. We have considered the enormous cost of underwriting our institutions of higher education as well as the cost of NOT underwriting them. These are our recommendations. Please add your own by joining us. Contact information is provided at the end of this document.:



NVU Johnson student, Rebecca Flieder,
with Professor Tyrone Shaw

Immediate Efforts

. Make an immediate effort to ensure returning and incoming students actually do enroll in the fall: Immediate outreach by a team led by admissions to every student, either by email or phone, to assure them that NVU will be open and is committed to their success.

. Immediate outreach to students who are unsure of their plans for next fall, given current circumstances. Make a very strong public commitment that NVU will be open in the fall. Reach out to area high schools and high school graduates to offer safe haven in difficult circumstances. If they are unsure of their plans or wavering about going to the college they had planned to in the fall, either for fear of a resurgence of the virus or for economic reasons, offer them what we might call a “stop-gap” year. Rather than deferring their education with a gap year (in which very little might be available to them), they could enroll at Lyndon or Johnson, live at home where it’s relatively safe and economically more viable, and still earn college credits. That way they can proceed with their education without losing time. And we may find that some of them decide to stay at Lyndon or Johnson once they realize the educational experience they can get here.

Longer Term Efforts:

. Eliminate the central office and subsume the Vermont State Colleges under the umbrella of UVM, making each of the campuses a satellite of the main campus (as is done in most state college systems in the country). That would eliminate the overhead of a central office that has simply failed to function effectively, with or without a pandemic. Certainly, such a merger would no doubt capitalize on the larger applicant pool of students who wish to come to or stay in Vermont for higher education but do not have the good fortune of attending UVM, for whatever reason including expense. Vermont needs not only to keep Vermonters here for education and beyond, but also to

draw students to the state to learn and, likely, to stay. Before we lose a lot more strong Vermont kids to other states by crippling their educational opportunities here, we need to turn things around and bring more young people to physically attend college here, to stay here, and to contribute to a stronger, healthier community. It is certainly no secret that students often stay to live and work where they went to college. We can't educate our own young people and draw kids "from away" without offering a solid education and good reasons for them to physically come to Vermont for a valuable college experience. Online education serves a purpose, but it won't do anything like what the real thing will do. And the notion that we will successfully compete with established online institutions such as SNHU is sheer folly and as misguided a strategy as the consolidation of LSC and JSC. If merging under a UVM umbrella is not viable, at least eliminate the Chancellor in favor of the existing council of presidents, who at least understand their various institutions, and trim the central office to only those minimal functions which really do demand central operation. The \$8 million dollars or so that the central office consumes really deliver nothing of real value directly to the education of Vermont students.

. Site CCV (as CCV) at each of the campuses in order to increase the number of commuter and local students using the existing space. There is clearly a pedagogical advantage to on-campus education, preserving the college experience that goes well beyond simply attending information-distribution sessions that occur online. Moreover, siting CCV at each of the campuses provides a tangible and immediate pathway from a two-year degree to a four-year degree, allowing students so inclined to continue their education even to the graduate level. Whatever your perspective on the current political situation and climate, several things are clear: every economic downturn increases the numbers of young and older people heading to colleges, and there is almost certainly going to be a substantial effort to reduce or eliminate costs at least for community college tuition. If the VSC fails to capitalize on those circumstances—and fails to use the opportunity to increase enrollments at the campuses—it will be not merely shortsighted but tragic. Even without eliminating the central office and merging with UVM, this second strategy would provide a perfectly reasonable alternative to campus closures and would allow for, at the very least, an intermediate stage before the radical "solution" of closing the college campuses. The capital investment in the current campuses would be preserved (as opposed to abandoned), and capitalizing on a projected increase in community college students would supply a stop-gap measure if not ultimately an opportunity to continue providing, "for the benefit of Vermont . . . affordable, high quality, student-centered, and accessible education, fully integrating professional, liberal, and career study, consistent with student aspirations and regional and state needs," as the VSC mission states.

. Economic downturns have historically always driven up college enrollments, as young people look to college for a leg up in getting a job and older workers require retraining. That uptick always favors lower-cost colleges, especially when traditional students already headed to college find that

economic circumstances require less expense for them. The VSC would stand to gain substantially from that uptick, but that will happen only if tuition can be reduced, which will happen only if the legislature increases funding to a truly viable level, at least doubling it from the paltry current 17% to something like 35%, closer to the 49% it was in 1980. That investment will pay off in increased enrollments and hence greater economic impact in the communities.

. Lyndon, in particular, has made a strong effort to increase athletic recruiting over the past 20 years, but not always efficiently or effectively. We have failed to take advantage of our geographic location or our local advantages. Reestablish ski teams (we had NCAA ski teams at both Lyndon and Johnson as recently as the early 1980s before budget cuts ensued) to take advantage of Lyndon's proximity to Burke Mountain and Johnson's to Stowe and Smuggler's Notch. We could easily recruit from Vermont (and beyond) for those who are looking to continue skiing competitively in college but at smaller schools. There are other opportunities for creating synergy between Lyndon and Burke Mountain Academy, one of the premier ski-racing academies in the US, and with Johnson and the Mount Mansfield Ski Club, one of the oldest alpine racing clubs in the US. Certainly, there are advantages in creating greater links with Burke Mountain, both for our interested skiers and for our Recreation and Athletic Training Programs, not to mention potential hospitality programs. In addition, establishing ice hockey teams for both men and women would also take advantage of our geographical location and expand recruiting opportunities, not to mention increase our attractiveness to Canadian students (as would ski teams). We talk about Do North, but there is really nothing "North" about baseball, softball (which can't really be played up here without paying a lot of money yearly to send kids to Florida to play while their own fields are under snow) or track and field, and there is nothing more "North" than hockey and skiing. We should capitalize on it as Castleton has – even though they are farther south than north.

. Increasing funding in order to reduce tuition immediately makes the VSC colleges more attractive. The VSC is one of the most expensive state colleges in the country, and that is widely known in college application circles. So we definitely need to use effective marketing to change that reputation and perception, and to increase awareness of the significant value offered by the VSC institutions beyond distinctive programs (which we don't want to ignore at the same time). We have done some valueless marketing in the past, particularly with the campaign to market NVU out of state, which did not yield fruit. So a more focused, strategic, "in-house" effort is needed. For example, both Lyndon and Johnson have had strong teacher education programs for years, and high school teachers in particular are extraordinarily influential when kids choose colleges. So we ask every single high school teacher who has ever graduated from any VSC institution to send us their top student for an unquestioned acceptance into the program of their choice with a scholarship award attached. That brings us successful students from all over the country and ramps up the reputation of the VSC colleges at every school where this program is active.

- . Take a year to develop solutions task forces in each community much like the think tanks for Act 46 consolidations.
- . Create a citizen-based group to push for more funding support from the State of Vermont - funding from Vermont is critical.
- . Pull together innovators with vision to look at the brick and mortar campuses and create cooperative living and learning environments that are bold and support student learning with community needs; cooperative living with the community, community classes in the arts, education, the environment, etc.
- . Offer residential options for CCV students in Randolph, Castleton, Lyndon, and Johnson
- . Remove some of the CCV sites that offer nothing more than strip-mall classrooms
- . Recognize that with a variety of learners comes the need for a variety of educational settings and "brick and mortar" institutions are just as necessary as online learning.
- . Eliminate the Chancellor's office and form a Council of Presidents who run the institutions; you can house other director type positions at the campuses around the state but they all coordinate their services.
- . Expand Nursing and medical programs - dispersing the Williston classroom materials to other sites for satellite services
- . Partner with the Vermont Studio Center to further develop and sustain an arts focus for NVU Johnson.
- . Operate as one system but with separate identities - with respect to marketing/sharing resources and other cost-savings measures.
- . Utilize the opportunities to be proactive with the economic needs of the state, if we need more nurses and we only have space for so many, utilize the campuses around the state as satellite campuses for nursing students.
- . Create a low-residency program at one of the campuses and utilize it during the rest of the year for conferences, workshops, maker space, construction opportunities for students in building programs - the possibilities are endless.
- . Engage with "senior" learners who may also see the campuses as desirable communal housing opportunities.
- . Create more "step up" certification courses in support of workforce needs.

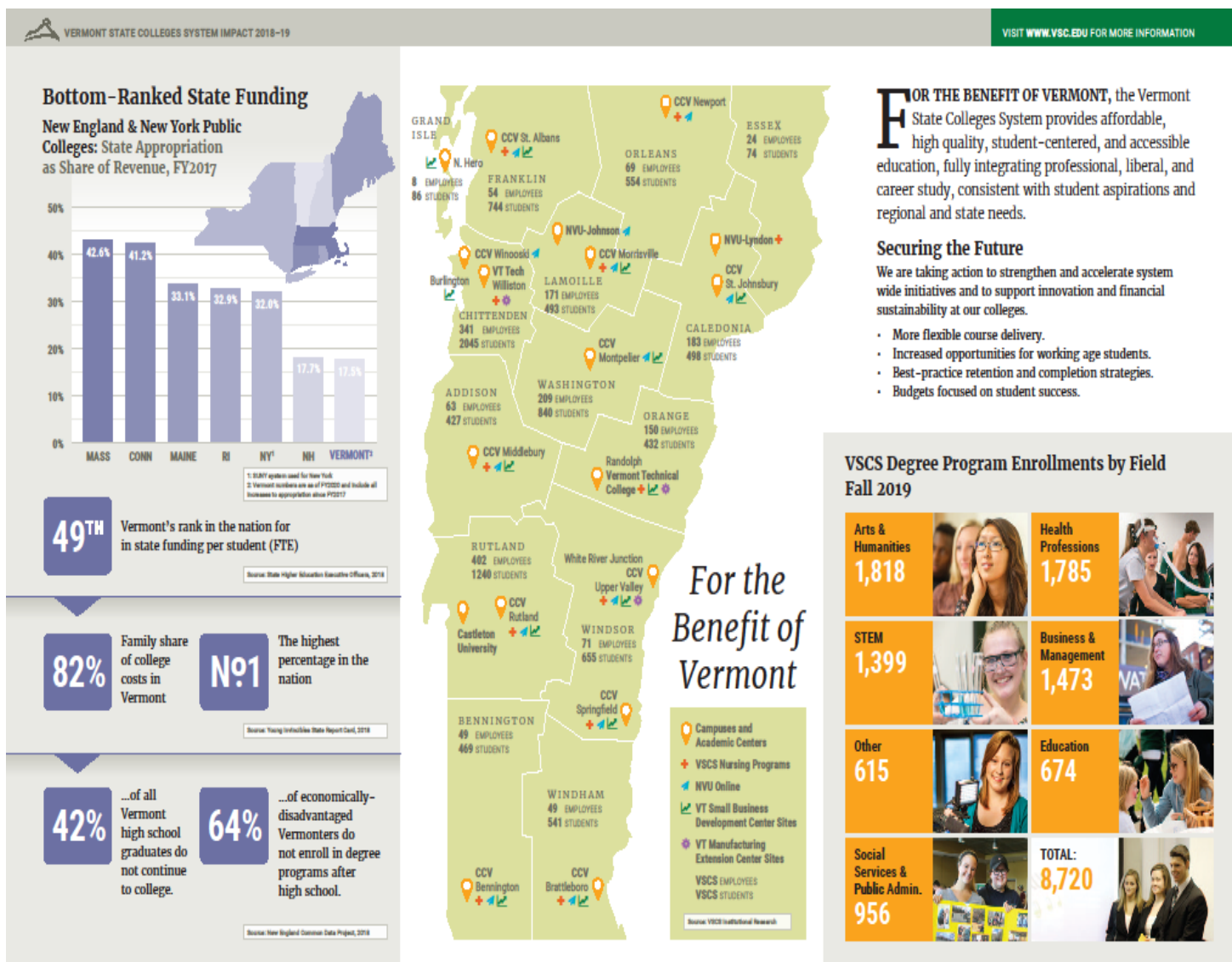
- . High aspirations – low continuation – drops off – affordability – Expected family contribution of 10K . They don't go far.
- . Recruit and retain staff who create a learning culture for students on campus. Keep students there over weekends, engage students, faculty, and staff in a robust and active campus that is inviting and creates the culture that represents the community.
- . Faculty should be full time in each program as a majority. Admissions, faculty, and staff should be part of a large marketing group, sit on statewide committees, advise and learn from commerce, K-12 and PreK-16 state planning groups.
- . Utilize past faculty, staff, and administrators to form a legacy advisory and recruiting team.
- . Work together with other VSCs to retain marginally accepted students into a remedial college readiness program.
- . Reduce the percentage of administrative expense to be aligned with student expenses.
- . Recognize the cultural/social values of a liberal arts college as integral to the community at large vs. just a “job training center” mentality.
- . Eliminate the Chancellor's Office and replace with a Board of Presidents and Leaders from with expertise to guide/advise and within the regions served.
- . Bring (new) leadership for the entire system under one umbrella in Montpelier or Waterbury.
- . Eliminate current administration from NVU and CU and reduce admin. support staff. Leave VTC and CCV management as is and conduct efficiency and cost assessment on admin. staffing.
- . Install new administration structure at NVU and CU - one head of each campus with limited support staff (TBD by student and faculty committee plus one former (retired) administrator and one outside business rep.
- . Establish a central office (in conjunction with the Board of Presidents/Leaders) to manage technology, payroll, legal, insurance, outside contracting, marketing and finance – essentially support roles for shared services.
- . Hire new director/manager to oversee centralized system functions and budget.
- . Eliminate the board of trustees and replace with new reps. selected by committee of equal representation between legislators, VSCS students, and faculty/staff. Two-year/four-year terms.

- . Ensure that plans for "creating an affordable degree program that meets the critical Vermont workforce needs" are adaptable to future trends and needs.
- . Build into the new plans, avenues to ensure NVU remains attractive to out of state students and at a minimum maintains the long-standing 30% total enrollment balance.
- . Out of state tuition per student is greater than 55% higher than in-state tuition. Important revenue stream.
- . Out of state students bring important geographical and social diversity, thus expanding the campus culture.
- . Out of state students often remain in Vermont following graduation. Add to the tax base as employees and start businesses (that employ Vermonters and increase state GDP).
- . Each institution should be known for its speciality, but not to exclude other programs:
 - NVU Lyndon: Meteorology, Forestry and collected sciences
 - NVU Johnson: Media and communications, Education
 - VTC: Institute for AG and Food Systems and Technology, Nursing
 - Castleton: Nursing, Education
- . Compact/MOU: between State Colleges and UVM relative to collaborative programming, resource utilization, and policy development.
- . Land Grant and State Colleges (especially VTC) should be connected relative to joint program and financial and program support and administration. (Note the suggestion in the 2009 Governor's report on this.) There are many programs at VTC and other state colleges that relate to the Land Grant mission and purpose.
- . With COVID-19 and relative need for re-education that will come out of this period, that the state colleges be designated as essential locations for re-educating individuals and others on skills training. Like in the 1930's it will be essential that programs and locations be in place to do this, and federal funding will likely be needed. Can the facilities also be utilized to other purposes connected to economic and cultural development in the regions.
- . Better utilization of these facilities year-round for multiple uses in education and training of ALL ages.
- . Commit to an independent economic analysis of the contribution that these institutions have contributed to the regions and areas, and what it would mean if lost.

- . Market the services and programs in a more integrated fashion with the Vermont Commerce and Tourism Divisions.
- . Cultivate relationships and future potential of all students who were “wait listed” or who were not accepted into programs.

Vermont State Colleges System Impact 2018-2019

(From the VSCS website - www.vsc.edu)



A Letter to Governor Scott, Lt. Governor Zuckerman, Vermont Legislators, the Chancellor of the VSCS and its Board of Trustees

May 7, 2020

The Honorable Phil Scott, Governor of Vermont

Lieutenant Governor, Mr. David Zuckerman

Chancellor (Interim), Vermont State Colleges, Sophie Zdatny

President, Board of Trustees, Vermont State Colleges, Churchill Hindes

Senate President Pro Tempore, Senator, Tim Ashe

Speaker of the House, Representative, Mitzi Johnson

Representative Kathryn Webb, Chair, House Committee on Education, Vermont

Senator Philip Baruth, Chair, Senate Committee on Education

Senator Brian Champion, Higher Education Subcommittee (Subcommittee of the PreK-16 Council)

Representative Carolyn W. Partridge, Chair, House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry

Senator Robert Starr, Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture

Representative Michael Marcotte, Chair, House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

Senator Michael Sirotkin, Chair, Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and

Representative Catherine Toll, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations

Senator Joe Benning, Senate Committee on Institutions, Chair

Senator Jane Kitchel, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

Dear Governor Scott, Lt. Governor Zuckerman, Chancellor Zdatny, Mr. Hindes, Senator Ashe,

Representative Johnson, Representative Webb, Senator Baruth, Senator Champion, Representative

Partridge, Senator Starr, Representative Marcotte, Senator Sirotkin, Representative Toll, Senator

Benning and Senator Kitchel,

We are writing to you as a group of citizens with many backgrounds, including community leaders, educators, students, alumni, business and development professionals, legislators, past college presidents, and others in order to both encourage your work in funding the Vermont State College System (VSCS) as well as offer our assistance in its reformation. We support a long-term funding and revitalization approach to creating a stable future for the VSCS.

Over the last three weeks, we as a group have had the opportunity to review and discuss the actions taken by Chancellor Spaulding in proposing the closure of several campuses of the State College system. We have also reviewed the joint response by Senate President Pro Tempore Ashe and Speaker of the House Johnson, Governor Scott, and others. While we know that the proposal has been rescinded and Mr. Spaulding has submitted his resignation, these two actions do not simply make the issues go away, nor

does the action alone pave a path forward. The issues he and others have identified cannot be ignored if the objective is to have a viable and sustainable higher educational system in our state that will serve ALL Vermonters, others in the region, and attract new Vermonters, regardless of their location, age, or economic backgrounds.

Here in Vermont, we are blessed with these five distinctive colleges that encourage, educate, and serve, predominantly, first-generation Vermont students. These colleges produce teachers and nurses, engineers and farmers, writers and artists, entrepreneurs. They nurture successive generations of active, vibrant, creative and committed citizens who have woven a tapestry of talent and common good to sustain our Vermont way of life in meaningful numbers. These campuses have vibrant futures and storied pasts. They have paved the way for thousands of graduates to take a chance, stay close to home, and better their lives with affordable education; not only for themselves, but for their families and their community.

In the many conversations we have participated in these past weeks, we have come to know current students, faculty, staff, alumni, concerned legislators and citizens as caring partners not only in the preservation of the VSCS, but as people who have always understood its challenges and what losing 60% of it will do to the future of higher education in Vermont. We recognize and reiterate the economic, social, and geopolitical importance of these important institutions and their legacies for future generations. This conversation is essential. And we know there is much more to this story than meets the eye.

70% of students attending Vermont State Colleges are Vermonters. Most live close to the schools they attend. Some of these students have deep roots in these communities, spanning generations. We should not disservice these students by saying that they are somehow less than their peers whose families have the means to send them 'wherever their GPA may take them,' because the VSCS serves all, has served all. Students who stay in-state for these opportunities come from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, and deserve the kind of high-quality education that the VSCS could provide, given appropriate funding.

It is also important to note that within the walls of the VSCS institutions are dedicated faculty with advanced degrees of their own from prestigious universities who have chosen to devote themselves to their students and to a way of life not easily duplicated elsewhere. These professors would be prized at other institutions, but chose the VSCS for its student-centric focus. They bring all of that here, to our VSCS, and pass along their knowledge to our mostly rural student body. This happens because these people, who live and work among us, serve on community boards and send their children to our schools, become part of us--with all the richness of their experience and expertise fully in bloom. It is through these experiences, relationships, growth, and acceptance that we are allowed and encouraged to be our best selves. Every interaction over these past few weeks has included this sentiment and underscored its

importance. We need the brick and mortar. We crave human interactions and opportunities for growth.

If we have learned anything from this recent social isolation, it is that our ability to thrive and grow and learn in our communities is what is important. It is in the “living together” that makes us whole.

We are the complexity of our history. We are children of farmers, laborers, factory workers, homemakers, and truck drivers. We are the future promise of Vermont that cannot be contained on a balance sheet. An acknowledgement of this rich heritage is essential in seeing the importance of the VSCS beyond a figure in a bank account. And while that is a critical component in the evaluation, it is not the only important factor in determining their worth.

These colleges are not degree mills-- they are foundational places of learning and leadership, where real emotional and social change can happen quickly. Look in the offices on each campus and you're bound to find graduates of that institution, who did not want to leave that special place behind. In almost every department, you will find a graduate or generational Vermonter who remembers going to a summer camp at VTC, JSC, LSC, or CSU. It is in the gathering of students and local residents who become dependent on each other for a meaningful life, shared experiences, and an exchange of ideas.

If an objective of the State of Vermont is to keep young people and others in our state, it is of critical importance to understand that over 80% of those who attend any of the state colleges remain after graduation. A renewed and sustainable vision and approach to higher education in Vermont that is not solely relegated and reduced to online learning must be developed very soon.

Further, in his recent letter to Governor Scott, Ward Heneveld, Ed.D., (letter attached) a retired professor of education in Vermont who has served at the World Bank and as Director of the School for International Training, and who began his career at Johnson State, observed this, “The Covid-19 impact on education delivery presents a unique opportunity for Vermonters to think holistically about the state’s overall education system. Let’s stop patching up a system that is not excellent and plan the renewal of the system so that it will be effective and affordable...Vermont is small and nimble enough to take on this challenge successfully. I agree with you, if the will is there.”

In his letter, Dr. Heneveld stressed the need to review the entire Vermont education policy and priorities with a course of action that addresses the needs in different parts of the state, emphasizing the “need to be balanced with the social welfare functions that education institutions have accumulated as family and community life have weakened.”

We also believe it is imperative to reevaluate the design of the governance of the VSCS. Bill Schubart, a

respected Vermont business person adroitly summed up the problem in a column he wrote for VT Digger (4/16/20). Schubart said, "We have a dysfunctional habit of loading up state governing boards with otherwise-occupied politicians and legislators. Both the VSCS and the University of Vermont suffer from this."

Each board has gubernatorial appointees, board elects, legislators and students, but they do not accurately represent the demographics of each institution.

"This is not the model for effective governing boards," wrote Schubart, "which are usually fully self-perpetuating and administered by a nominating and governance committee focused on a broad spectrum of possible candidates with skills that best support and fulfill the institution's mission. An effective VSC system would be overseen by such a governing board including the surviving college presidents and the UVM and Vermont Law School presidents as well as leading lights in education, community, business and philanthropy. The chancellor's office is a redundant operation. Retiring it will return some \$8 million a year to the system."

We agree. And, we believe that any plan must revitalize the system in a way that has the minimum disruption to the areas served by the Colleges and involves the voices of the people it serves-- rather than a board of elites in a closed loop. That point was made no clearer than the recent comment by VSC Board of Trustees President, Church Hindes who said, "Decisiveness during particularly urgent times is a critical element of sound leadership and is especially difficult when that sense of urgency is not widely shared or understood." Chair Hindes' statement speaks to exactly the problem: Many share and understand the Board's sense of urgency, but we were excluded from the table when the decision was made. That cannot continue. There are too many ideas to share and solutions to be found in our collective, skilled, and thoughtful population.

Lastly, we leave you with this thought from Mary L. Collins, a sixth generation Vermonter, graduate of Johnson State College, and a member of our citizen's initiative. She said, "We Vermonters are immigrants, all, with a certain amount of pluck and grit that made us able to survive long winters and short growing seasons. We are the grandchildren of farmers and mill workers who found ways to express ourselves as artists and poets despite our lack of high culture, or, in spite of it. We're newly arrived and generations deep. We are city dwellers and hill farmers. We welcome any and everyone who has a work ethic and doesn't whine when things don't go their way. We like it when you think old people are cool and when you show up as a volunteer firefighter to get a cat out of a tree for a child. We speak many languages and hold dear the funny phrases of our grandparents. It's what keeps them alive. We are the memories we hold of walking past the deli that once was our grandfather's barbershop still able to smell

cigar smoke and hear a Red Sox game playing on a transistor radio, yet, glad that the space has new life and a new vision. We know how to pronounce “Charlotte”, “Barre” and “Reading” but won’t correct you, if you don’t. A Vermonter is an amateur historian, a beekeeper, a school teacher, a rabbi, a world class athlete and a rock star. We are doctors and nurses, engineers, brewers and farmers – and sometimes multiples of these at once. There is no one type, one face, or one preferred heritage that defines us. That we even get to call ourselves “Vermonters” is reward enough; and that someone wishes to further

their education here among us – as both students from within the state and those who choose Vermont by allegiance to a way of life; to join our ranks should make us all shout, “Hallelujah! We’ve been waiting for you and we have vibrant communities of learning where we learn from each other. Welcome!”

And that, is the soul of Vermont: it’s the way we’ve done things. A petition to save our state colleges, started by NVU-Lyndon student Patrick Wickstrom, is a testament to the kind of political groundswell that happens when we feel that something we love may be threatened: nearly 30,000 signatures in less than a week and thousands upon thousands of emails in your inboxes.

This movement has gone beyond the senate floor and out from behind closed doors. It’s time for citizens, real Vermonters, to get involved in the work to save our Vermont State Colleges. We’re ready and able to take up the mantle of this struggle. Through invention and imagination, we can find solutions to the real problems the VSCS faces.

We ask that citizen involvement be considered and included in any future discussions or decisions that will impact the Vermont State Colleges and the regions they serve. We urge you to consider any future plans for higher education in Vermont be reviewed and discussed with stakeholders from the institutions and regions affected by the proposed changes. We are willing to help, and we are asking for broad representation during planning and decision making. Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Roger Allbee, Former Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, Former CEO of Grace Cottage Healthcare
Mary L. Collins, Johnson State College, Class of 1981, Educator, Writer, Community Activist
Cathy Collins Printon, Johnson State College, Class of 1985, Class Agent, 1985, JSC Staff Member 1986-1990 and 1997-2000, VTC Staff Member 1993-1997
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Adriana Eldred, Senior, Northern Vermont University, Johnson
Rebecca Fleider, Senior, Northern Vermont University, Johnson*

Alan Giese, Professor of Biology, Northern Vermont University, Lyndon

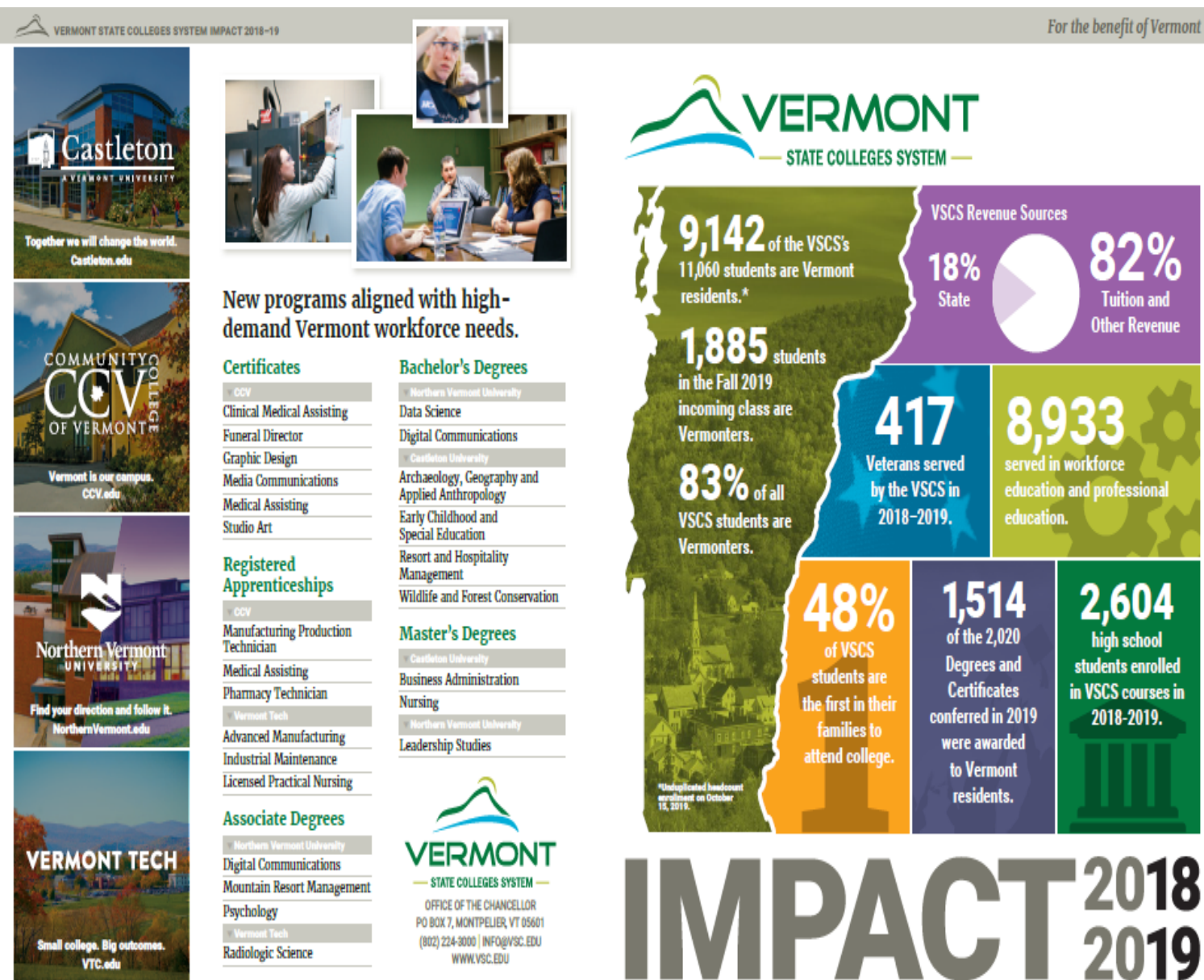
David Johnston, Professor, Visual Arts | English, Philosophy, and Film Studies, Northern Vermont University, Lyndon

Linda Olson, Interim President VSC FF, Vice President Education AFT-VT, Sociology and Women's And Gender Studies Programs, Castleton State University

Susan Sweetser, Esq., Johnson State College, Class of 1981, Student Representative Board of Trustees, Professor, St. Michael's College

Vermont State Colleges System Impact 2018-2019

(From the VSCS website - www.vsc.edu)

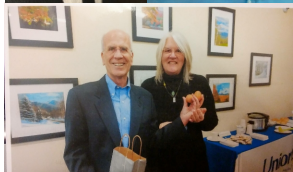


“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children.” - John Dewey

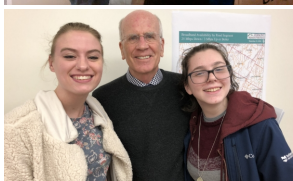
Who We Are:



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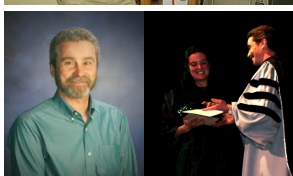
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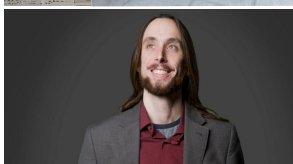
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