

Minutes of the VSCS Board of Trustees Meeting held Monday, November 13, 2023, at 1:00 p.m. via Zoom – APPROVED

The Vermont State Colleges Board of Trustees met on Monday, November 13, 2023, via Zoom

Board members present: Lynn Dickinson, Betsy Bloomer, Janette Bombardier, Megan Cluver (1:30 p.m.), David Durfee, Bob Flint (1:52 p.m.), Karen Luneau, Perry Ragouzis, David Silverman, Shawn Tester, Sue Zeller

Absent: Shirley Jefferson, Bill Lippert, Jim Masland

Presidents: Joyce Judy, Nolan Atkins (Acting)

Chancellor's Office Staff: Jen Porrier, Administrative Director
Katherine Levasseur, Director of Governmental & External Affairs
Sophie Zdatny, Chancellor
Yasmine Ziesler, Special Assistant to the Chancellor

Shared Services: Donny Bazluke, Network/Security Analyst
Kellie Campbell, Chief Information Officer
Sarah Chambers, Director, Learning Technologies
Matt Corriere, Technical Projects Manager
Timothy Dusablon, Operations & Security Specialist
Gayle Malinowski, Chief Technology Officer
Sarah Potter, Chief Human Resources Officer
Kathryn Santiago, Associate General Counsel
Sharron Scott, Chief Financial & Operating Officer
Patty Turley, General Counsel
Meg Walz, Director, Project Management

From the Colleges: Nolan Atkins, Provost, Vermont State University
Kelley Beckwith, Vice President of Student Success, Vermont State University
Mary Brodsky, Dean of People & Culture, Community College of Vermont
Ryan Dulude, Director of Financial Aid
Nicole Mace, Dean of Administration, Community College of Vermont
Maurice Ouimet, Vice President of Admission & Enrollment, Vermont State University
Sarah Truckle, Vice President of Business Operations, Vermont State University
See attachment for full list of attendees

From the Media: Sean Cavanaugh, Reporter, News 7
Anna Guber, Reporter, NBC 5

1. Chair Dickinson called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.
2. Public Comment

The Trustees heard twenty-three public comments over a one hour period from current and former faculty, staff, and students of the Vermont State Colleges. Chair Dickinson thanked everyone for sharing their feedback and reiterated that the trustees were fully briefed on both Optimization 2.0 and the administrative optimization plan and are supportive of the actions being taken. She noted that the trustees recognize that these changes are hard, particularly for those most directly impacted by the plans. The trustees also recognize their responsibility as fiduciaries to ensure that the new university implements the necessary changes to achieve financial sustainability. Chair Dickinson stated that President Smith laid out a plan which puts the university on a path towards financial stability and this is what the state, the Governor, and legislative leaders expect Vermont State University to do. The work to operationalize those plans will move forward under Acting President Nolan Atkins and incoming President David Bergh. She again thanked everyone for their comments, passion, and commitment to the success of Vermont State University.

3. Approval of October 30, 2023 Minutes

Trustee Zeller moved and Trustee Luneau seconded the motion to approve the October 30, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion was approved with one abstention.

4. Reports from the Presidents

Acting Vermont State University President Nolan Atkins acknowledged the shared comments from earlier in the meeting and thanked everyone who turned out to offer their opinions. President Atkins spoke of his involvement in the trenches of transformation for the past seven years, including through the unification of Lyndon State College and Johnson State College. He shared that the pathway to sustainability is now becoming clearer to him and the changes being made to restructure the academic offerings and administrative structure are integral parts of a plan that he believes will lead to financial sustainability. President Atkins shared that VTSU met its target enrollment numbers for both new and returning students for this academic year. He was excited to share that faculty member Ross Lieblappen received a \$3 million grant to study microbes in sea ice and their connection to climate change. This will give students the opportunity to study microbes in the Arctic. VTSU is responding to help address the critical nursing shortage in VT and across the country by expanding its program to nearly 1,000 students. There are planned nursing capital investments at the Williston and Johnson campuses to support program growth and a new simulation lab at the Lyndon campus. There are also continued investments and enrollments in workforce, including the largest apprenticeship program in plumbing and electrical with over 800 students. VTSU is pleased to welcome Oyibo Afoaku as Chief Diversity Officer on January 8th as they join the team to continue to enhance and lead VTSU's DEI efforts. Finally, the VTSU Complete College Accelerator project launches on November 17. At the kick-off meeting, leadership will identify four initial institutional priorities to improve student outcomes based in part on baseline data about campus perceptions of student success.

Community College of Vermont President Joyce Judy shared that CCV recently hosted a successful NECHE accreditation visit looking at CCV's delivery of educational programming in Vermont's Corrections system. CCV co-sponsored a press conference with the McClure Foundation to celebrate Free Degree Promise on National First-Generation Student Day. Now in its second year, the McClure Foundation promises a free degree through the state's Early College program to all Vermont high school students in the classes of 2023-2026. This program reinforces that, when college is affordable, people enroll. President Judy also shared that 640 students are currently being taught CCV courses in high schools and tech centers around the state. Finally, CCV was awarded a \$1.2 million grant from a federal partnership between the Northern Border Regional Commission and the U.S. Department of Labor that will support workforce education. This funding will support CCV's Career Pathway Entry Program Plus, which is designed to prepare Vermonters for high-wage, high-growth careers. CCV was one of just three grant recipients in Vermont.

5. Report from the Chancellor

Chancellor Zdatny echoed the appreciation to all those who provided public comments. As this meeting was her last regular Board meeting, the Chancellor thanked the Board for the opportunity to serve the Vermont State Colleges, to the state for its continued financial support and encouragement for the ongoing transformation work, and to all those with whom she has worked during her tenure. Recognizing that many have questioned whether the system truly needs a Chancellor moving forward, she listed the key responsibilities of the Chancellor and the need to preserve the role in order to lead and support the ongoing work of transformation. Chancellor Zdatny also noted the significant and ongoing transformation of the Office of the Chancellor, including the reduction in personnel and the physical size of the office. She concluded by sharing some data regarding the personnel who work in Shared Services – more than one-third of whom are covered by collective bargaining agreements, more than half of whom work on VTSU's campuses or in CCV's academic centers, and the number of employees in each of the Shared Services' areas.

6. Report from the Finance and Facilities Committee

a. Motion to approve the Florilla Ames Endowment

Trustee Silverman shared some background about Florilla Ames's remarkable background and noted that the Florilla Ames Endowment will provide scholarships to undergraduates attending VTSU's Lyndon campus.

Trustee Silverman moved and Trustee Zeller seconded the motion to approve the Florilla Ames Endowment. The motion was approved unanimously.

b. Motion to approve changes to the Bridges to Vermont Scholarship

Trustee Silverman shared the changes to the Bridges to Vermont Scholarship criteria for receiving the scholarship to broaden eligibility, while honoring the original intent of the award.

Trustee Silverman moved and Trustee Luneau seconded the motion to approved the changes to the Bridges to Vermont Scholarship. The motion was approved unanimously.

c. Motion to approve changes to the Alumni Association Endowment

Trustee Silverman shared the updated criteria for the Vermont Technical College's Alumni Association Endowment, which now provides that students with at least a 2.5 GPA who have completed their first year of college and are enrolled in an agricultural program or veterinary technology will be eligible to receive the George F. Wellman Memorial Scholarship.

Trustee Silverman moved and Trustee Luneau seconded the motion to approve the changes to the Alumni Association Endowment. The motion was approved unanimously.

Trustee Silverman concluded by noting other matters covered at the recent Finance and Facilities Committee meeting included a review of the FY2023 Financial Performance by Chief Financial and Operating Officer Sharron Scott and an update on the VSC's intended legislative ask for the upcoming session.

7. Report from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair of the DEI Committee, Associate General Counsel Kathryn Santiago provided the report on behalf of the DEI Committee. The Committee met on October 30th and heard a report from Mary Brodsky, CCV's Dean of People and Culture. Dean Brodsky described CCV's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee's work over the past five months. Secondly, Assistant Director of DEISJ at VTSU, Aurora Hurd, shared an update on the successes and challenges of the ongoing DEISJ work at VTSU. Finally, Student Trustee Perry Ragouzis provided an update on the status of the proposed anti-racism pledge developed by students from across the system and the ongoing planning for its launch.

8. Report from the Education, Personnel, and Student Life Committee

a. Motion to approve award of honorary degree to Howard Coffin

Trustee Cluver asked the Board to approve the resolution [here](#) on page 17 to award an honorary Doctor of Letters degree to Howard Coffin at the VTSU Lyndon Commencement on May 24, 2024. She noted Mr. Coffin's work to record and preserve Vermont's civil war history and his attendance at Lyndon State College in 1960-1962 before leaving for Vietnam with the U.S. Army.

Trustee Cluver moved and Trustee Luneau seconded the motion to approve Resolution 2023-014, awarding an honorary Doctor of Letters degree to Howard Coffin at VTSU-Lyndon's May 2024 commencement. The motion was approved unanimously.

b. Motion to approve revisions to VSC Policy 208: *Criminal Background Checks*

Trustee Cluver noted that Chief Human Resources Officer Sarah Potter explained the purpose behind the revisions to Policy 208 at the October 30th EPSL Committee meeting. These changes include obtaining background checks for part-time faculty and staff, receiving the results of online background checks prior to new employees starting work, clarifying that the cost of the background check will be covered by the employer, not the employee, and ensuring the policy complies with the Fair Credit Reporting Act. Trustee Cluver noted that the effective date of the revised policy is to be February 1, 2024, per the request of Human Resources. The brief delay in the start date for the new policy will avoid disrupting the ongoing hiring process for part-time faculty for the Spring semester and will provide sufficient time to train staff on how to conduct online background checks.

Trustee Cluver moved and Trustee Zeller seconded the motion to approve the revisions to VSC Policy 208: Criminal Background Checks, effective February 1, 2024. The motion was approved unanimously.

Trustee Cluver shared other matters covered at the EPSL Committee included: a data snapshot for Fall 2023 that showed five-year trends on enrollment, persistence, and retention; an update on direct transfer pathways between CCV and VTSU; and an update from then-President Mike Smith on VTSU's program array Optimization 2.0 and its administrative optimization plan.

9. Report from Executive Committee

Chair Dickinson provided an update from the Executive Committee's most recent meeting on October 31st and the Chancellor Search. The Committee met with Interim President Mike Smith on October 31 for a final update on the status of VTSU's Academic Optimization 2.0 and Administrative Optimization plans before his departure. The Executive Committee recently interviewed three semi-finalists for the position of Chancellor. The final interviews will be held in person in Burlington on Thursday, November 16th. Each finalist will participate in three interviews – with the full Board, with faculty and staff representatives of both CCV and VTSU, and with senior leaders from CCV, VTSU, and Shared Services. A final decision is expected to be made within the next couple of weeks.

Chair Dickinson noted that the VSC consists of two unique and different institutions: Vermont State University and Community College of Vermont. These two institutions are different from each other and have very different histories. Vermont State University is a unification of the legacy residential colleges, originally the Normal Schools and Vermont Technical and Agricultural College. They were originally joined together in the 1960's to become the Vermont State College System. The Normal Schools were primarily serving their respective rural areas as the source of teachers for the K-12 schools in their areas, while Vermont Tech was primarily a technical and agricultural school that granted associate degrees in these specialized fields. CCV was created in the 1970's and is unique as a community college in that it was established as an alternative school in local communities for adult and other non-traditional students. Credit was granted for life experience. It eventually expanded and grew and joined the Vermont State College System as the fifth college, but its legacy as an alternative school still is strong and it does not include Associate degree programs that traditional community colleges offer, since many of these programs are currently at VTC. The two institutions, VTSU and CCV, can and do complement each other. Many students start their post-secondary education at CCV and then transfer to Vermont State University campuses.

Chair Dickinson also highlighted that the positions of President and Chancellor have very different roles. The President works to support the interest of the college or university in providing education in accordance with their mission, while the Chancellor works to support the interests of the State and its role and needs for post-secondary education. The Chancellor is necessary to guide the work of the two presidents to ensure the system is operating efficiently and in concert with one another. The Shared Services model developed over the past two years, significantly reduces duplication for administrative work and is foundational to the hybrid university that we will need for the 21st Century. Shared Services staff are not Chancellor Office staff but support the employees and students of VTSU and CCV in many ways, such as by supporting their IT needs, processing payrolls, managing employee benefits, and overseeing library system. Many of these staff operate at the system level but work locally at VTSU and

CCV. The Shared Services structure allows for cost allocation to ensure we are maximizing our resources, sharing our expertise, and providing for nimble and flexible response. This allows us to reduce our costs, learn from each other, and maximize resources without compromising services. If the Vermont State Colleges system is to survive to continue to serve the State of Vermont, then it must change and become more efficient. That's the incredible transformation and optimization work we have undertaken.

10. Update on planning for ERP replacement and motion to approve resolution in support of project governance structure

Kellie Campbell, Chief Information Officer, provided an update on the ERP replacement project. The presentation can be found [here](#). Dr. Campbell shared background information on the ERP project and then discussed the governance proposal, located at page 5 of the presentation.

Trustee Cluver noted that documenting efficiency savings and cost avoidance is important, but it is also important to document those areas where strategic investment in technology could enhance the student experience. For example, how can AI be leveraged to be more responsive to students.

Trustee Zeller moved and Trustee Tester seconded the motion to approve Resolution 2023-013: ERP Project Implementation Governance. The motion was approved unanimously.

11. Report on State-funded Projects from CCV and VTSU

CCV President Judy began by sharing that during the 2023 legislative session, Governor Scott proposed, and the legislature funded, a program to reduce CCV's tuition by 50% for the 2023-2024 academic year in certain degree and certificate programs. Ryan Dulude, Director of Financial Aid at CCV, shared further information on the Vermont Tuition Advantage Program and its success. Further information can be found [here](#) on page 23. Mr. Dulude noted that 2,400 Vermonters have enrolled in Vermont Tuition Advantage Programs, which has resulted in \$2.44 million in tuition savings to Vermonters in Fall 2023. There has been a 32% reduction in borrowers in VTA programs compared to Fall 2022. President Judy noted that this 50% cut in tuition brings CCV's tuition to the national average for community college tuition. CCV is committed to addressing affordability. CCV is seeking additional funding for the Vermont Tuition Advantage program through the Budget Adjustment Act.

VTSU Acting President Nolan Atkins provided an update on the various VTSU programs with financial support from the legislature.

- The curriculum for the Bachelor of Science degree in restorative justice, plus a certificate, is being developed and is anticipated to come before the EPSL Committee and the Board in January for approval, before going through the faculty governance process. The program will be available state-wide to serve both traditional and non-traditional students. There will be a low-residency option over the summer as the pedagogy does require some face-to-face instruction.
- VTSU is seeking a reallocation of the legislative funding designated for a program to upskill staff in long term care facilities as there has been very limited uptake in this tuition-support program. Ideally, the funding can be repurposed to purchase additional nursing simulators.

- The delivery of a dental therapy program has been challenging: the search for a program director is ongoing and the curriculum is in the process of being developed.
- The CTE pathways pilot programs are intended to provide a convenient and local pathway to a VTSU degree. Currently, there are some CTE students taking paramedicine courses at VTSU-Williston at a reduced tuition rate. More work needs to be done on developing pathways and marketing them.
- The 3D-Technology certificate is making good progress. The certificate will be available to traditional and non-traditional students, as well as to high school students and is designed to be accessible to a non-technical audience. The certificate will be offered at the Castleton, Lyndon and Randolph campuses and in different modalities. The certificate has been approved through the faculty governance process and has been discussed at recent Open Houses with high school students. The certificate is on course to be delivered this spring and to high school students over the summer. Some additional equipment is needed prior to the certificate's launch.
- The state funding for nursing simulators is well on its way and there are no concerns.
- Vice President of Business Operations, Sarah Truckle, shared that good progress is being made on setting up the Meat Lab in Randolph. A site has been identified, necessary additional funding has been secured, a director has been hired, and the project should be going out to bid shortly.

12. VTSU free tuition proposal – discussion and motion to approve

Sarah Truckle, Vice President of Business Operations, shared that VTSU's free tuition proposal comes close to guaranteeing free tuition for students/families with an adjusted gross income of \$50,000 or less. Further information on this proposal can be found [here](#) on pages 28 and 29. Chief Financial and Operating Officer, Sharron Scott, noted that this proposal did not come before the Finance and Facilities Committee first as required by policy as VTSU wishes to move forward with marketing the proposal as soon as possible.

Trustee Ragouzis moved and Trustee Tester seconded the motion to approve the Vermont State University Free Tuition Guarantee. The motion was approved unanimously.

The Board requested that, even though the proposal has been approved, it be placed on the agenda for the upcoming Finance and Facilities meeting for further discussion.

13. Executive session on collective bargaining – action expective to be taken upon exit

At 3:38pm Trustee Dickinson moved that the Board enter executive session, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(B) labor relations agreements with employees, and 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(F) to consider confidential attorney-client communications, because premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body involved at a substantial disadvantage. Along with the members of the Board present at this meeting, in its discretion, the Board invited the Chancellor, the Chief Financial and Operating Officer, the General Counsel, the Acting President of Vermont State University, the President of the Community College of Vermont, and VTSU's Vice President of Business Operations to attend the executive session. Trustee Luneau seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

The Board exited executive session at 3:51 p.m.

Trustee Bombardier moved and Trustee Ragouzis seconded the motion to approve the Guiding Principles for the upcoming collective bargaining. The motion was approved unanimously.

Trustee Bombardier moved and Trustee Durfee seconded the motion to ratify the new full-time faculty contract with the Vermont State Colleges Faculty Federation. The motion was approved unanimously.

Trustee Ragouzis moved and Trustee Zeller seconded the motion to ratify the new part-time faculty contract with the Vermont State Colleges Faculty Federation. The motion was approved unanimously.

14. Additional Business

There was no additional business.

15. Executive Session – Board training on Vermont’s recent amendments to the Fair Employment Practices Act (Act 80) – no action expected upon exit

At 3:54 p.m. Chair Dickinson moved that the Board enter executive session, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(F), to receive confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the Board, because premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body involved at a substantial disadvantage. Along with the members of the Board present at this meeting, in its discretion, the Board invited Attorney Kerin Stackpole, the Chancellor, the Presidents, General Counsel, Associate General Counsel, the Chief Human Resources Officer, CCV’s Dean of People and Culture, and VTSU’s Academic HR Manager. Trustee Tester seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

The Board exited executive session at 5:09 p.m.

Chair Dickinson adjourned the meeting at 5:09 p.m.