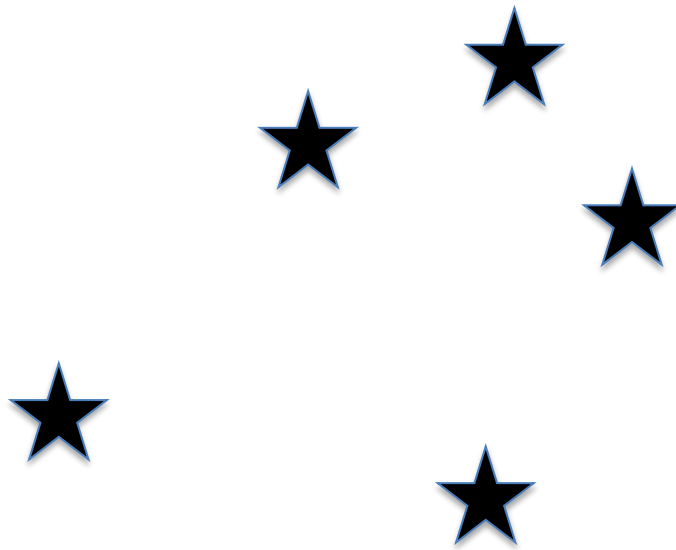


**UNITING VERMONT:
A DESIGN FOR A UNIFIED PUBLIC-ACCESS HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Labor Task Force for Public Higher Education in Vermont

**Proposed by members of the Labor Unions of the Vermont State
Colleges System (VSCS)**

November 2020



*Out of storm and manifold perils rose an enduring state, the home of
freedom and unity.*

Thomas Chittenden

About the image: A unified system of public-access higher education for Vermont will balance freedom and unity by uniting the five public-access campuses and the regional community colleges into a single system, as depicted by Libra, the constellation symbolizing justice through balance.

UNITING VERMONT:
A DESIGN FOR A UNIFIED PUBLIC-ACCESS HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Vermont, it has become apparent that the public-access higher education system established in the 1960s must adapt to changing conditions. This document outlines a proposal for a rational and pragmatic redesign of the system. The design will unite Vermont by providing an affordable, in-state, high-quality, equitable public-access option to serve more college-bound Vermonters in Vermont.

This design is presented by a team of VSCS staff and faculty who volunteered to lead a task force organized by the labor unions representing VSCS employees. The Task Force's charge was to develop a vision for a shared future through research, community input, and systems thinking that would be grounded in extensive student-centered experience. Collectively, the staff and faculty of the VSCS have decades of experience in, and commitment to, the day-to-day operations of the Vermont State Colleges. We have the perspective and perseverance to unify the system and will do so with partners across all sectors of the state along with our communities and our students.

Design Principles

Recent upheavals across the VSCS have demonstrated the need for renewed attention to the fundamental elements of public-access higher education. Creating a sustainable system of higher education requires reiterating its broad *purpose* and properly balancing its operations through attention to *cost*, *access*, and *quality*. The design principles underlying this proposal address each of these fundamental elements:

1. Public-access higher education should serve the common good by providing advanced learning through career preparation, civic engagement, community service, and personal well-being.
2. The cost of attendance must be both reasonable and manageable, particularly to make undergraduate enrollment affordable and attractive. The current cost of attendance must be reduced through an increase in state funding and through more efficient operations.
3. Access should be enhanced by integrating academic and student service operations across the system, expanded with a revised portfolio of academic programs, and enlarged through an inclusive model of lifelong learning.
4. Quality can be assured through comprehensive faculty and staff collaboration, and, most significantly, by implementing a model for shared governance that accords with current best practices in higher education.

Goals

Through conversations with members of the community in a series of public Town Hall Meetings and a study of similar system-wide reorganization efforts, the Task Force used the design principles to generate goals for the proposal.

Cost Goals

- Enable students to graduate low-debt or no-debt
- Reduce expense of administrative operations to levels of peer institutions
- Maintain multiple campuses to support regional economic vibrancy

Access Goals

- Preserve current campuses as hubs for local educational and student life opportunities
- Design flexible delivery formats for in-person, online, applied, and self-directed learning
- Expand workforce development options through certificate and non-degree opportunities

Quality Goals

- Foster collaboration through cross-campus structures that bolster communication
- Design interdisciplinary academic programs that are both practical and meaningful
- Form partnerships with local organizations to integrate applied learning

Recommendations

As detailed in the Discussion section below, the vision and goals for the proposal can be achieved through four major recommendations. Recommendations 1 and 2 call for the legislature to re-orient Vermont's higher education funding and appropriation mechanisms to balance unity of the common good with freedom of choice, which are Vermont's grounding values. Recommendations 3 and 4 provide a design to increase financial efficiency through consolidation while enhancing access and quality through collaboration and shared governance.

- 1. In order to reduce tuition, increase state appropriation for public-access higher education to achieve parity with national averages and keep the promise that “the VSC ... shall [be] supported in whole or in substantial part with State funds” (Vermont 16 V.S.A. 2171).**

Vermont has an unfortunate history of inadequately funding higher education. Since the 1980s, the state appropriation has been reduced from 51% to 17.5% of the VSCS budget. The result of this neglect has been higher tuition, increased student debt, cuts to staff, faculty, and programs, reduction of student access, and deterioration of infrastructure.

2. Reconsider the distribution of public funds for enrollment in out-of-state colleges. Redirect a significant portion of this grant to the state college system for a tuition-assistance program.

Unrestricted VSAC portability has diverted millions of tax dollars annually to out-of-state institutions while Vermonters who seek in-state, public-access college have been restricted from attendance and completion.

3. Unify the four institutions of the VSCS into a single-accreditation institution of public-access higher education to be titled Vermont State University (VSU).

Unifying the VSCS into a single system with a common mission and distinct educational approaches across campuses will increase access, collaboration, and innovation. Consolidating common executive and upper-level administrative operations will reduce operating expenses. The VSU Executive Office will meld the operations of Chancellor's Office and the four existing Executive Teams into a single system-focused leadership team.

4. Establish a structure for shared system-wide decision-making by trustees, faculty, staff, and the executive team.

Recent and recurring events within the administration of the VSCS indicate that the existing governance model would be greatly enhanced with direct and consequential communication between the trustees and members of the faculty and the staff. As noted by the American Association of University Professors and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, involving faculty and staff with trustees is a best practice for governing boards. Currently, over 13% of public institutions include faculty members as trustees with voting rights and another 9% include faculty as nonvoting trustees.

By increasing the state appropriation and redistributing public funds to strengthen unity of opportunity, establishing a unified organizational structure and reconstituting the governance board this design serves the common good while improving financial efficiency, reducing cost of attendance, expanding access, and assuring quality through collaboration. This proposal will unite Vermont and maintain the legacy of providing future generations with a network of opportunities for transformative higher education.

DISCUSSION

Purpose of Higher Education

The Uniting Vermont proposal reclaims the central idea that accessible public higher education serves the public good while benefiting individuals. Those who achieve a college degree earn more money, have better job stability, and have a more affluent lifestyle. However, the monetary benefits of higher education extend beyond the individual. A more educated populace is beneficial for our communities, our states and our country. Research tells us that “over a lifetime, bachelor’s degree holders contribute \$381,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits”¹ and have annual earnings that are 134 percent higher (about \$32,000) than high school graduates who did not attend college².

Many of the individual benefits of achieving a bachelor’s degree have implications for society², including:

- The incidence of poverty is 3.5 times lower.
- The likelihood of having a retirement plan through employment is 72 percent greater.
- Retirement income is 2.4 times higher.
- Job safety is greater. The incidence of receiving workers’ compensation is 2.4 times lower.
- The probability of being employed is 24 percent higher.
- The likelihood of being unemployed is 2.2 times lower.
- The likelihood of reporting health to be very good or excellent is 44 percent greater.
- The likelihood of being a regular smoker is 3.9 times lower. The incidence of obesity and heavy drinking are significantly lower. The likelihood of exercising, having a healthy diet, wearing seat belts and seeking preventative medical care are significantly higher.
- Life expectancy at age 25 is seven years longer (for those having at least some college compared to those never having gone to college).

A Lucky Life

It was pure chance and good luck that took me from the St. Albans Grain Company to Johnson Teachers’ College.

Maybe not chance since I hated that job. I was hired right from high school and only because I was the fastest typist. Which only goes to show that fast typing does not a good office worker make. I think they were quite relieved when I quit.

Perhaps not luck either since I followed my brother who was enrolled under the G.I. Bill as the easiest way to get away. The need for teachers was so great that there was no tuition.

I applied and was accepted only days before the school year started. Who knew that teaching and I would be a perfect match. That I, a private person, would find joy and fulfillment spending my days learning with hundreds of children over the years. What luck!

Gladys Clark Menkens (1929-2017), Johnson Teachers’ College class of 1952

- Asset income is 4.9 times greater (\$1,900 more per year).
- The probability of being in prison or jail is 4.9 times lower.
- The likelihood of being happy is significantly higher.

What many people seem to undervalue are the benefits of a college education that go far beyond the individual. Some of the most surprising benefits include²:

- Volunteering is 2.3 times more likely. The estimated value of volunteer labor is 4.1 times (\$1,300 annually) greater.
- Employment in the nonprofit sector is twice as likely. The estimated value of the implicit wage contribution to nonprofits is 8.7 times (\$1,500 annually) greater.
- Annual cash donations to charities are \$900 (3.4 times) higher.
- Total philanthropic contributions (i.e., the value of volunteer labor plus the value of the implicit contribution to nonprofits plus cash donations) are \$3,600 (4.7 times) higher.
- Voting and political involvement are significantly higher.
- Participation in school, community, service, civic and religious organizations is substantially (1.9 times) higher. Leadership in these organizations is particularly (3.2 times) greater.
- Community involvement is significantly greater. For example, attendance at community meetings is 2.6 times greater.
- Neighborhood interactions and trust are significantly higher.

Higher education is not just a personal good; it is a community good. When students are free to let their imaginations go places that they never knew existed, they become entrepreneurs, community leaders, teachers, healthcare providers, scientists, ecologists, and more, each contributing to the common good and domestic tranquility. Affordable public higher education is a social justice issue that requires attention to both individual freedom and social unity. Public-access higher education is vital to the well-being of our state.

Cost Considerations

This section of the report provides details for Recommendations 1 and 2, which address the Cost element of the Design Principles, that is the high cost of tuition.

- 1. In order to reduce tuition, increase state appropriation for public-access higher education to achieve parity with national averages and keep the promise that “the VSC ... shall [be] supported in whole or in substantial part with State funds” (Vermont 16 V.S.A. 2171).**

Vermont has an unfortunate history of inadequately funding higher education. Since the 1980s, the state appropriation has been reduced from 51% to 17.5% of the VSCS budget. The result of this neglect has been higher tuition, increased student debt, cuts to staff, faculty, and programs, reduction of student access, and deterioration of

infrastructure. The points detailed in this section provide an analysis of the consequences of this condition.

a. *Comparing Vermont State Colleges Headcount to Tuition and Demographic Data*
(by Greg Petrics, Professor of Mathematics at NVU-Johnson, see Appendix A)

There has been a great deal of discussion on changing demographics in Vermont with a projected decline in the traditional college-age population. While this decline certainly could have an impact on college enrollment in Vermont, it is the cost of tuition, due to a lack of state support, that appears to play a more significant role (Figure 1). Vermont currently ranks 49th out of 50 states for state support for public higher education. In fact, Vermont is one of only eleven states that spends more on prisons than it does on public higher education.³ This means that our students pay the second highest tuition in the country and carry more debt after graduation. Since former VSCS Chancellor Spaulding released the report titled *Serving Vermont's Students by Securing the Future of the Vermont State Colleges System* in 2019, a belief has been widely circulated that the VSCS's primary obstacle to success is declining demographics in the State of Vermont. However, this belief needs to be critiqued. The number of Vermonters aged 18 to 24 years old has remained relatively stable from 2011 to 2020, at 65,000 to 68,000.⁴ Furthermore, there is no observed relationship between the number of Vermonters aged 18-24 and VSCS headcount.⁵ Declining demographics is *not* the primary explanation for the declining headcounts at the VSCS. Rather, it is the increasing tuition charged by the institutions that is having a negative effect on enrollment. As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between increasing tuition and decreasing enrollment is almost perfectly linear. As the tuition has risen between 2011 and 2020, the headcount is almost perfectly negatively related.

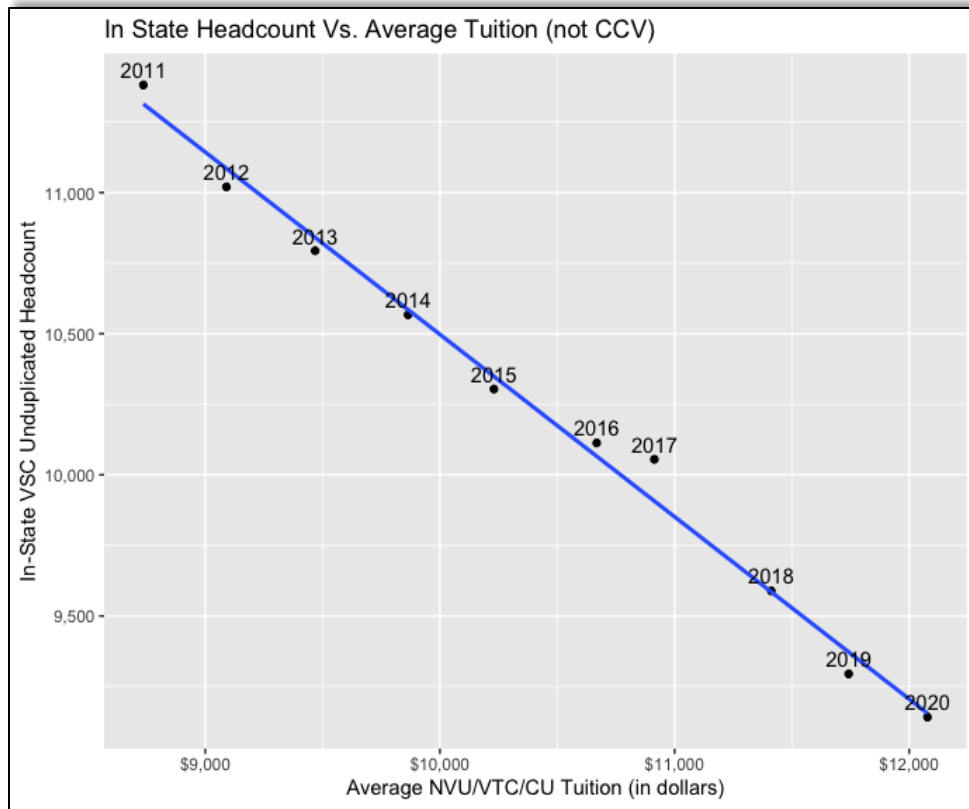


Figure 1. Relationship between increasing tuition and decreasing VSCS headcount, 2011-2020

b. The High Cost of Tuition is Causing Students to Leave Vermont to Attend College Out of State

In comparison with other states, Vermont has the highest percentage of students who leave the state for college. A full 51% of our students go out of state for college (Figure 2). When students stay in state to go to college, they are more likely to stay in state after graduation. If we can reduce the financial burden of attending college in the state, we will keep more students in Vermont to buy homes, raise their children, and work in Vermont.

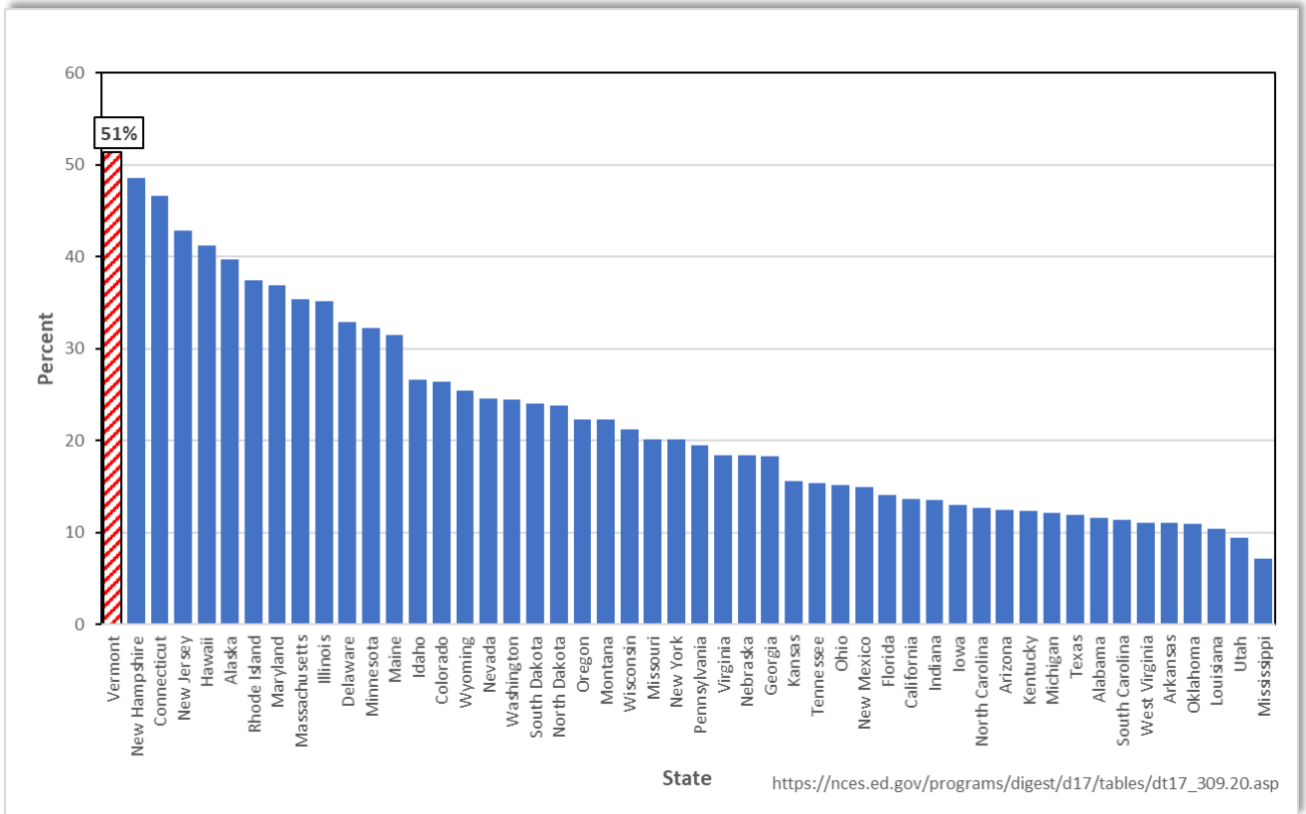


Figure 2. Percent of first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates in degree-granting postsecondary institutions who graduated from high school in the previous 12 months and who migrated out of state, Fall 2016. Vermont has the highest rate.

c. The High Cost of Tuition Means Vermont Students Are Less Likely to Go on to College

While Vermont ranks among the highest in the country for high school graduation rates, it ranks sixth from the bottom for students going on to college after graduation (Table 1). Since we have one of the highest tuitions for public higher education in the country and our students graduate with more debt, reducing tuition for our Vermont students simply makes sense.

College-going rates of high school graduates directly from high school			
Mississippi	77.5	Pennsylvania	62.4
Connecticut	73.9	Rhode Island	62.4
Massachusetts	73.1	Florida	62.2
New York	71.4	Ohio	61.8
New Jersey	71.1	Hawaii	61.7
Louisiana	70.7	Indiana	61
Delaware	70.5	New Hampshire	60.8
Minnesota	70	Colorado	60.1
Tennessee	69.7	Kentucky	60
New Mexico	69.3	Oklahoma	58.8
South Dakota	68.5	Missouri	58.6
South Carolina	68.5	Wisconsin	58.6
Virginia	68.3	West Virginia	58.4
Alabama	66.4	Texas	57.7
Iowa	66	Maine	56.6
North Dakota	65.4	Wyoming	56.5
Georgia	65	Nevada	56
Maryland	64.8	Montana	55.1
Nebraska	64.8	Arizona	53.7
Kansas	64.8	Vermont	52.6
North Carolina	64.2	Washington	51.4
Michigan	64.2	Oregon	49.3
Illinois	63.3	Utah	47.1
California	63.2	Idaho	43.8
United States	63.1	Alaska	43.8
Arkansas	62.6		

Table 1. College-going rates of high school graduates directly from high school (2016)⁶
Vermont is sixth from the bottom, well below the national average of 63.1%.

d. Driving Down the Cost of Tuition will Positively Impact Enrollment

Most of the free and reduced tuition programs in the country are relatively new. But there is some research to suggest that they have a positive impact on enrollment where they are being implemented.

- i. The Tennessee Promise program was one of the first of its kind, beginning in 2015 to offer “last dollar” tuition and fee assistance to eligible students

enrolling in 2-year colleges in the state. “Last dollar” means that the program only covers remaining tuition and fees leftover after federal and state aid are first expended.

- ii. A new study published in the *Labour Economics Journal* estimates “that the Tennessee Promise program has brought about at least a 40% increase in enrollment at Tennessee’s public two-year colleges.”⁷ It also boosts attendance among Black and Hispanic students. Lastly, the author does estimate a conservative 2 percent decrease in enrollments at 4-year institutions after the program was enacted. A lesson to take from this is that any Promise Program in Vermont should cover both 4- and 2-year institutions. The Brookings Institute also confirms that the Tennessee Promise boosted college enrollment.⁸
- iii. The *College Promise Predictor of Students' Completion Rates* finds that College Promise programs broadly contribute to increased completion rates for students attending colleges and universities associated with Promise programs. “The completion rates were statistically significantly higher for Pell Students, Non-Pell Students, and All Students at rates of 44%, 44%, and 45%, respectively.”⁹

e. Education Appropriation per Student.

- i. The state has a statutory obligation to fund the state college system “in whole or in substantial part.” Currently Vermont’s appropriation per full time student is 35% of the national average (Figure 3)¹⁰.

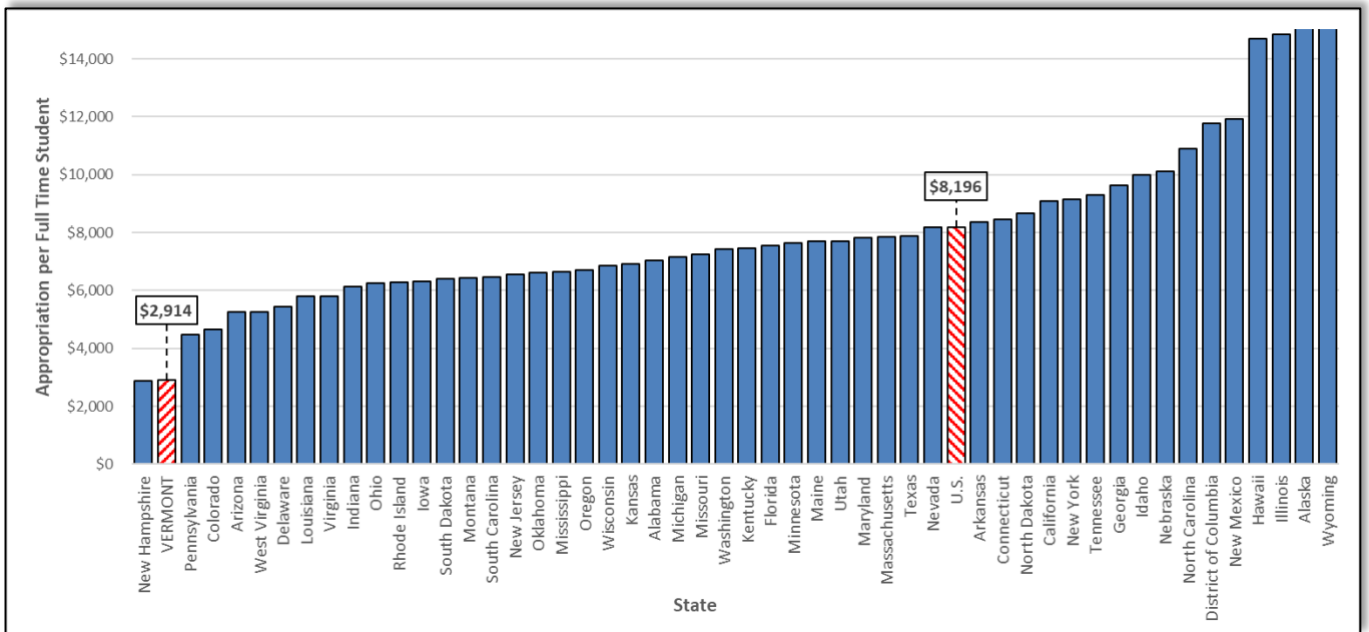


Figure 3. National Public Higher Education Appropriations Per Full-Time-Equivalent Student.

2. Reconsider the distribution of public funds for enrollment in out-of-state colleges. Redirect a significant portion of this grant to the state college system for a tuition-assistance program.

Unrestricted VSAC portability has diverted millions of tax dollars annually to out-of-state institutions while Vermonters who seek in-state, public-access college have been restricted from attendance and completion. Redirecting these funds would generously support a tuition-assistance program for in-state college aspirants.

Vermont is an extreme outlier: only 12 other states (plus D.C.) reported sending *any* grant aid out-of-state. Using data from the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs¹¹, we found:

- i. Vermont sent between 23 and 31 percent of need-based grant aid out of state between 2008 and 2018, by far outpacing other states. This is significantly higher than all other states; Arizona is second to Vermont, sending 8.6 percent of its aid out of state.
- ii. In 2017-18, Vermont granted about \$5 million of need-based grant aid to students who took it out of state; that amounts to 24 percent of VSAC appropriation.
- iii. In 2017-18, U.S. students used a total of \$11.8 million in aid to attend institutions that were not in their home states. Of that \$11.8 million, 41.7 percent was paid by the state of Vermont. In 2016-17, \$10.3 million dollars in need-based aid followed US college students out of their home state to an institution in another state. Vermont supplied over half of those dollars—nearly 53 percent.

a. Estimating the Funding Needed for a Tuition Assistance Program

Using data from 2017-18, we estimate that if Vermont implemented a last-dollar tuition assistance program, the state would be on the hook for between \$3.5 million to \$4.7 million in the first year for the first cohort, depending on whether enrollment remained the same, went up by 20 percent, or went up by 40 percent. We estimate that it would cost the state between \$5.8 and \$8 million in the second year of the program, assuming 64.5 percent of the first year's cohort continues onto their second year (Table 2).

	EXAMPLE: COST TO STATE FOR REDUCED TUITION		
Assumptions:	No enrollment increase due to reduced tuition promise	20% enrollment increase due to reduced tuition promise	40% enrollment increase due to reduced tuition promise
1st Year Net Cost	\$3,474,400	\$4,065,048	\$4,742,556.00
2nd Year Net Cost	\$5,886,850	\$6,887,614.08	\$8,035,549.76

Table 2. Estimated cost to Vermont for reduced tuition.

Table 2 demonstrates assumptions for three scenarios: one with no enrollment increase, one with a 20 percent increase and one with a 40 percent increase. The 40 percent figure comes from the study assessing enrollment in the Tennessee Promise Program, which found that enrollment increased by 40 percent at 2-year colleges⁷.

These estimates take into account overall reduced enrollment trends due to COVID. The National Student Clearinghouse reported that undergraduate enrollments are down 2.5 percent from last year (though graduate enrollment grew by 3.9 percent and community colleges were hit the hardest with 8 percent declines)¹².

b. Funding a Tuition Assistance Program

If unrestricted portability of VSAC funds were to be completely eliminated by the Vermont legislature, there would be a significantly larger pool of money from which to support free or reduced tuition at public institutions of higher education.

The total amount of VSAC Needs-Based Grant Aid Leaving Vermont in 2017-18 was \$4,944,000.00. Redirecting that grant funding to a tuition-assistance program would adequately fund the first year of tuition in a last-dollar assistance program (Table 3).

In the second year, assuming the amount of portable grant aid remains constant, VSAC funds could cover 60-84 percent of the last-dollar program, depending upon changes in enrollment. (Table 3).

	Percent of State Cost Covered by VSAC Needs-Based Grant Aid Leaving Vermont (Total amount in 2017-18: \$4,944,000)		
	No enrollment increase due to reduced tuition promise	20% enrollment increase due to reduced tuition promise	40% enrollment increase due to reduced tuition promise
1st year	142.30%	121.62%	104.25%
2nd year	83.98%	71.78%	61.53%

Table 3. Percent of tuition cost covered by VSAC needs-based grant aid leaving Vermont

c. An Issue of Social Justice:

Social justice requires attention to both freedom of choice and unity of purpose. While social justice supports individual freedom of choice to travel out-of-state for college, social justice also requires attention to the common good through equitable opportunity for those who are not as privileged. Many Vermonters no longer have access to affordable public higher education due to a lack of state support. The quantity of the public funds granted to VSAC to enable attendance at out-of-state colleges demonstrates an imbalance between Vermont’s two grounding values of freedom and unity. With appreciation for the bridge funding, which is supporting a transition year, it is clear that a long-term funding solution is needed. That solution should re-balance the values of freedom and unity by fulfilling the state’s commitment to support the state college system “in whole or in substantial part with State funds.” Portability funding must be part of that conversation.

Why is our campus important to our community?

When I think about what our small campuses mean to our small Vermont communities I begin by thinking of our students. Many of our students are first-generation (meaning the first in their families to complete a college degree) Vermonters of limited means. Having a public institution of higher education that isn't in another state means that these students can strive to reach out for something that they couldn't imagine before coming to our campus. Their eyes are opened to worlds and work they never knew existed.

Our community also extends into the villages that surround and embrace our campuses. Businesses depend on us, not just for the rent our students pay, the lodging for their parents on family weekend or commencement, and the groceries we all buy, but for our students and alums who staff their human services, schools, hospitals, and hospitality and environmental organizations, just to name a few. Our communities benefit from the use of our campus resources and the diversity and culture that we add to their lives.

And, of course, our community encompasses the state of Vermont, and the world. Our graduates are lawmakers, doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, meteorologists, counselors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs – and our neighbors. They serve on our town councils and boards with our non-profits. They run for office, organize campaigns, and change the world. Vermont is dependent on the Vermont State Colleges System and should fund them as they promised to, “in whole or in substantial part with State funds.”

Beth Walsh – Director of Career Development at Northern Vermont University-Johnson for 7 year

Access and Quality Considerations

This section of the report provides details for Recommendations 3 and 4, which address the Access and the Quality elements of the Design Principles.

3. Unify the four institutions of the VSCS into a single-accreditation institution of public-access higher education, to be titled Vermont State University (VSU).

Unifying the VSCS into a single system with a common mission and distinct educational approaches across campuses will increase access, collaboration, and innovation. Consolidating common executive and upper-level administrative operations will reduce operating expenses. The points below provide an outline for elements of a single System. Additional elements should be analyzed by a transformation leadership team.

- a.** Appoint a president for VSU who will lead the University with a single executive team. The VSU Executive Office will replace the Chancellor's Office and consolidate the executive teams of the existing institutions.

- b. Consolidate common upper-level administrative operations.
- c. Disperse executive and upper-level administrative offices throughout the campuses to allow the administration to better know each campus and its needs and to eliminate the need to rent office space in Montpelier (Chancellor’s Office).
- d. Establish VSU campus hubs for direct academic and student-life operations: Castleton, Northern Vermont (Lyndon and Johnson), and Vermont Tech.
- e. Coordinate community campus and residential campus operations. Connect each community campus (CCV campuses) with one of the residential campus hubs to ease academic transfer across the University.
- f. Direct the campus hubs to establish distinctive instructional approaches and student life environments to act as magnets for attracting applicants and generating a sense of community on campus and among alumni.
- g. Direct faculty to establish University-wide schools led by faculty deans to unify and manage academic affairs. Have faculty and staff establish University-wide specialized academic support units, such as a Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, a Center for Online Learning and Technology, Continuing Education and Workforce Development, and a Division of Graduate Studies (Figure 4).

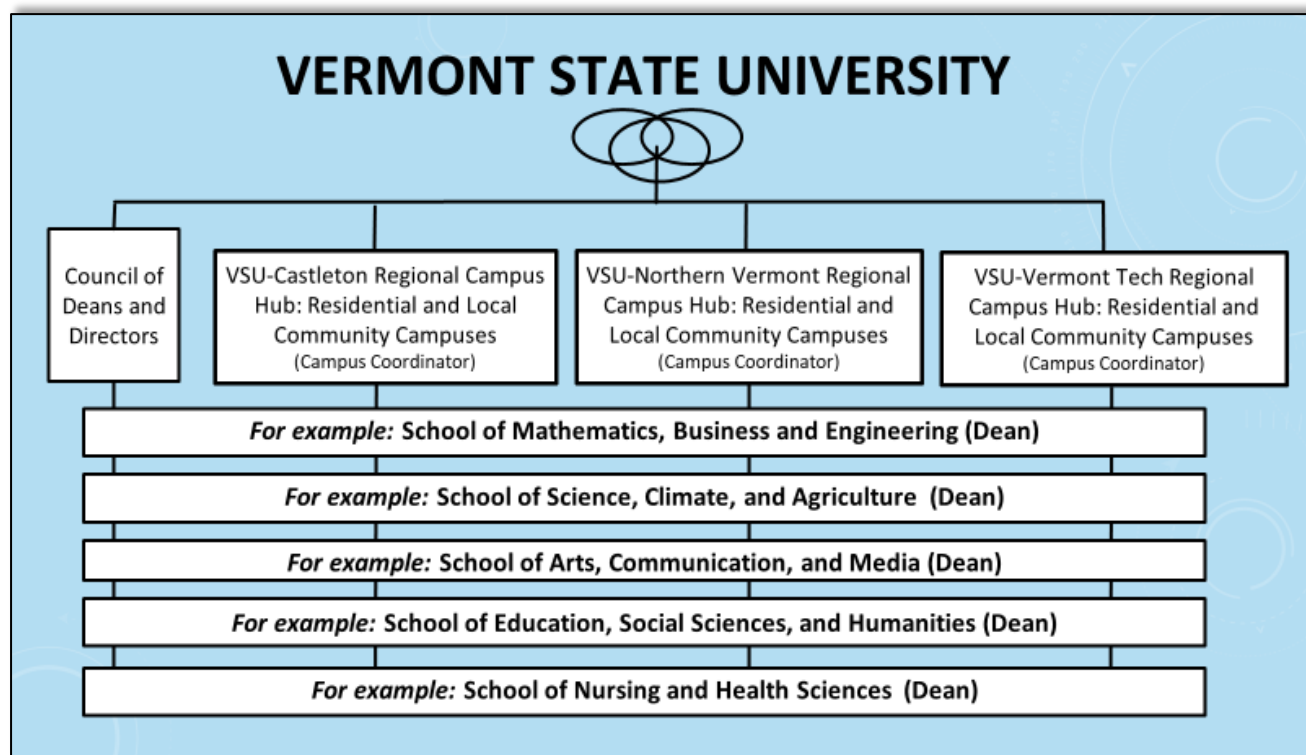


Figure 4 Example of University-wide schools.

- h. Unification will help to stem the erosion of full-time faculty and staff which, if it continues, will lead to diminishing the quality of education offered by the system.¹³

Figure 5 shows significant reduction in faculty and staff over a seven-year period. Note that the only increase in staffing over this period has been at the Office of the Chancellor.

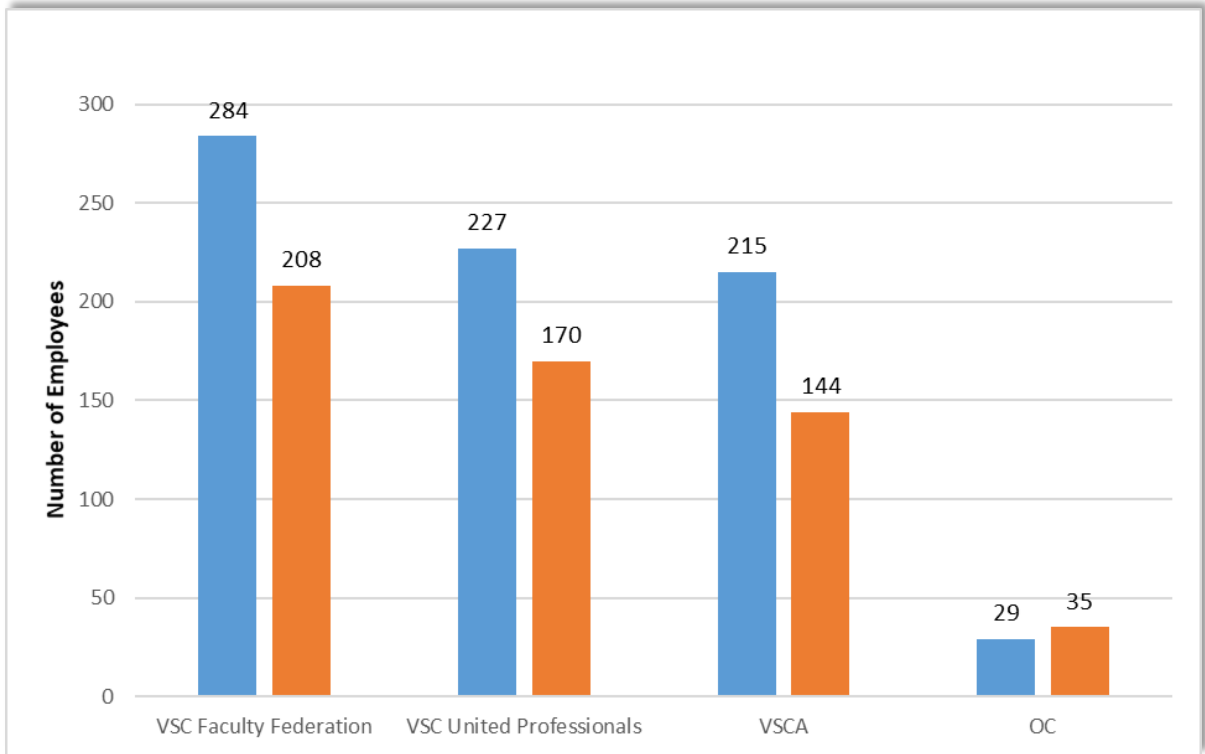


Figure 5. Change in Full Time Employees from 2012 to 2018

The reduction in payroll costs due to the elimination of bargaining unit employees (staff and faculty) has not been matched by a reduction in Non-Bargaining Unit (NBU) payroll (Table 4).

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Lyndon	1.26	1.43	1.33	1.22	0.95	0.87	1.02		
Johnson	1.32	1.35	1.27	1.27	1.18	0.99	1.16		
Castleton	1.95	1.92	2.15	1.90	2.15	2.06	2.14	2.05	2.01
VTC	4.53	4.62	4.50	4.25	3.55	3.74	3.52	3.89	4.25
OC	2.03	2.16	2.24	2.28	2.69	2.67	2.81	2.95	2.40
NVU								2.48	2.39
All NBU	11.12	11.50	11.50	10.95	10.55	10.34	10.66	11.38	11.06

Table 4. Change in payroll (millions of dollars) for NBU employees from 2012-2020.

- i. Unification will reduce expenses considerably by reducing the number of upper-level administrators such as college presidents, provosts and chief financial officers.

At present, salaries and benefits for deans and upper-level administrators cost approximately \$14,000,000 per year. With unification, many of these become redundant; even a modest 50% reduction in Administration salaries would save \$7,000,000 annually.¹⁴

- j. The Chancellor's Office would be replaced by an Executive Office which can be based at the campus hubs, eliminating the expense of maintaining separate office space.
 - k. Unification will be implemented using a model of shared governance (below) which will eliminate competition and redundancies between the campuses and enhance cooperation and collaboration among faculty across the system.
 - l. The community college campuses and residential campuses will be coordinated and connected to ease academic transfer across the university.
 - m. The campus hubs will continue to maintain their identity as educational, cultural, athletic, and economic centers¹⁵ for the regions in which they are located. Each campus hub will maintain its distinctive and historic instructional approaches which will maintain their sense of community on campus and among alumni. (For example, the Working and Learning Model at Northern Vermont.) Students will choose a home campus but, in essence, have access to the entire system through a combination of face-to-face, remote and intensive-residency course offerings.
4. **Establish a structure for shared system-wide decision-making by trustees, faculty, staff, students, and the administrative team.**

Recent and recurring events within the administration of the VSCS indicate that the existing governance model would be greatly enhanced with direct and consequential communication between the trustees and members of the faculty and the staff. As noted by the American Association of University Professors and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, involving faculty and staff with trustees is a best practice for governing boards. Currently, over 13% of public institutions include faculty members as trustees with voting rights and another 9% include faculty as nonvoting trustees.

The fundamental premise for a shared governance model to succeed in higher education requires students, staff, faculty, administrative team, and trustees to participate in the decision-making process of an institution. In a shared governance model these constituents enjoy a sense of responsibility for, and ownership of, their institution. Shared governance strengthens leadership and decision-making, but to be effective and sustained there needs to be an atmosphere of mutual “trust, collaboration, communication, transparency, inclusiveness, honesty, and integrity”.¹⁶

Implementing shared governance requires a cultural change in an institution of higher education. Once shared governance is implemented, constituents need to remain vigilant as to its effectiveness during routine day-to-day decision-making as well as any unanticipated challenges.

- a. Vermont State University would enhance decision-making using a shared governance model (Figure 6). The governing board (what is currently the Board of Trustees) of this model would be comprised of students, staff, faculty, administrative team, and trustees. To attain more balance in the governing board, we recommend that the board include the additional following members:

- Four members elected from and by the full- and part-time faculty
- One member elected from and by the librarians
- Two members each elected from and by AFT-VSCUP and VSEA units
- Two members elected from and by the student body.

The staff and faculty members will represent their constituents' experience through direct communication about policymaking with the trustees and the Executive Team. All members of this governing body will be elected and serve limited terms.

The Public Good

Three years ago, I attended the budget hearings in Rutland to testify about the need for the legislature to more adequately support public higher education in Vermont. As I sat and waited for my turn to testify, I was struck by the number of former students who trickled into the room. Being a seasoned veteran at these budget hearings, I arrived a half hour early so I could testify first and head home. I did indeed testify first, but I stayed for all of the testimonies because I wanted to hear what my former students had to say.

It turns out half of the testimonies presented that night were given by these Castleton alums and all of these former students gave a proud shout out to their alma mater before they eloquently testified on behalf of the most vulnerable people in Rutland. They testified about the need to support programming for those trying to overcome addiction, for afterschool programs, early childhood education, low income housing initiatives, housing weatherization funds for low income people, and various green initiatives.

All of these former students spoke passionately about the causes they represented. All were majors in my department of Sociology, Social Work, and Criminal Justice. All are also my Facebook friends; I attended one's wedding, and I got the birth announcement for another's eldest child, now 12, who sat next to her mother as she testified. This is the public good of the work of the VSC; our graduates work to give voice to those who are disenfranchised.

Linda Olson – Professor of Sociology at Castleton University for 26 years

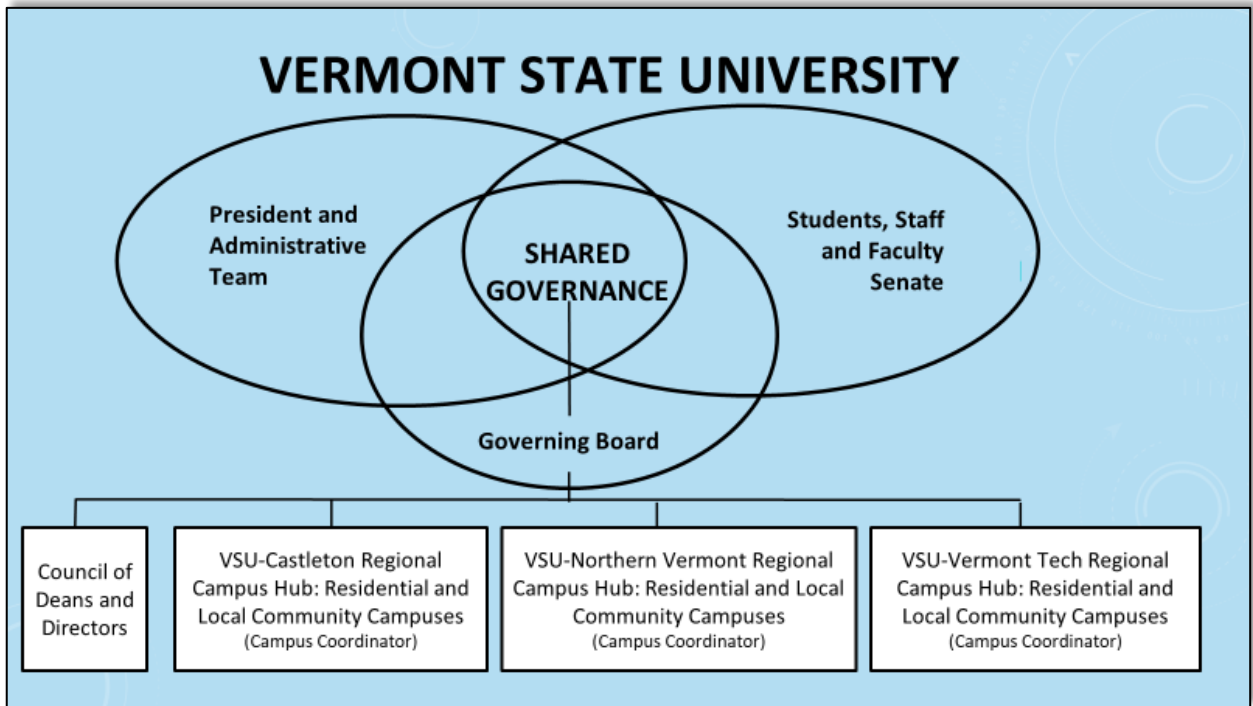


Figure 6. Model of shared governance for the Vermont State University.

- b.** The staff and faculty Senate will include faculty and staff from all three campus hubs and their associated community college sites. The Senate will work with the faculty, staff, and students from across the system, partnering with the Executive Team (President and Deans) and the Board of Trustees (Governing Board) for operational and curricular decision making and budgetary approval. The inclusion of all the partners in carrying out important decisions will assure a broad and integrated perspective of the needs of the institution as well as increasing success of implementation.

CONCLUSION

While the VSCS has been serving the citizens of Vermont since it was established in 1961, it is now time for a renewed vision to connect the work of the colleges and the needs of the state.

It is worth noting that the institutions constituting the state college system were first implemented by local communities to advance their aspirational aims for the local children. Over 180 years ago, local shopkeepers, shoemakers, and families joined together to create academies so their children could extend their learning beyond the primary grades. As state-supported schools emerged, the academies were converted to business training institutes and teachers' academies (that is, normal schools). Once the state began regulating teacher licensure and other professions, those professional academies were converted to 2-year colleges. With the GI Bill and a rising demand for bachelor degree programs, the 2-year colleges converted to 4-year liberal arts-based residential colleges, which originally operated independently but soon coalesced into the VSCS. In the 1970s, as other social and regulatory conditions changed, the Chancellor's Office emerged as a centralizing function for a federation of institutions. The Community College System arose around that time to provide no-credit, apprenticeship-like learning opportunities for citizens who sought personal and career development in a form other than college. Instructors were local craftspeople and professionals who guided participants through the

For the Future of Vermont

The Vermont State Colleges are a vital part of local communities and the state. The employees, students, and our families support local businesses by shopping at the stores, dining in restaurants, buying gas from the convenience stores, paying a mortgage and/or rent to local banks, and being regular customers of the small businesses. We also have families who work in these places.

What will happen to the employment in town if the colleges reduce the staffing? How will the businesses survive?

The support the colleges give our towns keeps employment high for the businesses. This means more money into the state coffers, which equals more assistance for state services and low unemployment in the regions.

I have two granddaughters who want to attend Johnson after they graduate from high school. The oldest one is 16. She has been a fan of JSC since she was a young girl. Nine-year-old Abi has grown up on campus, from eating at the dining hall, climbing the infamous rock, meeting Senator Doyle, and spending some time with me in my office before she heads out on the soccer field to throw snowballs at her brother and sister. When she heard Jeb Spaulding say, "we are going to close Johnson, Lyndon, and Randolph," her first comment was, "No. They can't do that. I want to go to Johnson. What do they want us to do, go to California? No way! I'm staying in Vermont." I admire her determination. She knows what she wants, when she wants it, and how she is going to make it happen.

Sandra JC Noyes –Office Manager, 28 years at Johnson State College and Northern Vermont University-Johnson

everyday work of their fields. Against the warnings of many citizens, the Community College mission drifted as they began competing with the residential colleges to offer credit-bearing courses and degree programs.

As this brief review demonstrates, the current conditions of the VSCS simply indicate that the time has come for another transformation of the system. The next iteration should follow the 180-year trend by remaining locally-based, citizen-oriented, publicly-supported, and unified.

Vermont already has more experience with higher education consolidation than many states. Currently, Connecticut is enmeshed in a project to unify its independent community colleges, and is connecting the state colleges through a central office. Vermont has already completed these moves. Pennsylvania has recently embarked on a project to connect and perhaps unify a number of state colleges. Vermont has already demonstrated such a move with the unification of Johnson and Lyndon into Northern Vermont University. Other states are embracing even more-widespread plans for unification. Georgia is in the midst of a multi-year unification effort that includes unifying community colleges with residential colleges. (For more information about current approaches to the future of public higher education in Vermont see Appendix A.)

The *Uniting Vermont* plan demonstrates a rational and pragmatic vision for the future in accordance with our historic experience, current practices in higher education renewal, and regional needs. The plan adheres to the four design principles (purpose, cost, access, quality) and will meet the nine goals generated through research and with public input across numerous Town Hall meetings. The four recommendations will guide the System to a new era in which Vermont's grounding values of individual freedom and public unity are balanced for the benefit of all citizens facing the chaotic uncertainty of a complex, disruptive, yet creative future.

Ultimately, the aim of *Uniting Vermont* is to unite Vermonters in reimagining and constructing the future of higher education for the benefit of Vermont. Our plan is a forum for deliberation, innovation, and collaboration. We will continue to develop the plan and refine the recommendations as the pool of responses and questions expands. All voices are welcome.

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APPENDIX A

The Vision Landscape for the Future of Public-Access Higher Education in Vermont

It is worth noting that, as of this writing, there are three draft plans for the future of public-access higher education in Vermont. (Chancellor Spaulding's plan demonstrated a fourth option, but it was widely rejected by the citizens; probably, it was rejected because it did not acknowledge the legacy of local access and community service that are inherent to the system.)

A draft plan promoted by a grassroots group, *VSCS Thrive*, calls for elimination of the Chancellor's Office and a return to independent institutions to be coordinated by a Council of Presidents. (For many more details, see <https://vscsthive.org/>)

Another draft plan promoted by the *National Center for Higher Education Management* (NCHEMS), which is the consulting firm commissioned by the *Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education in Vermont*, recommends unifying Castleton University and Northern Vermont University while leaving Vermont Technical College and the Community College of Vermont to operate independently, and maintaining the Chancellor's Office. (For more details see <https://ljfo.vermont.gov/committees-and-studies/select-committee-on-the-future-of-public-higher-education-in-ve>)

Uniting Vermont, the draft plan offered by the *Labor Task Force for Public Higher Education in Vermont*, calls for a comprehensive transformation of the System in accordance with Vermont's historic tradition of community-based higher education and a re-balancing of Vermont's values of freedom and unity to properly fund the System for all citizens. The plan envisions a single public-access higher education system in which the five residential campuses and the community campuses are unified into a refined network of learning opportunities managed through authentic shared governance.

In addition to the three future-vision draft plans, there are other endeavors providing ideas for the System. The VSCS Board of Directors charged the Chancellor's Office with the formation of *VSC Forward*, a task force to plan for the future of the System. To date, the *VSC Forward* team has begun implementing a series of recommendations for refining existing operations (such as, a plan for a common General Education program), but has not designed a future vision for the System. As such, *VSC Forward* and the Chancellor's Office are pursuing an iterative approach while anticipating the final decision of the legislature. (For more details, see <https://www.vsc.edu/board-of-trustees/vscsforward/>)

Two scholars have released papers with recommendations for the future of the VSCS. The Vermont legislature hired Dr. Jim Page as a consultant to provide an overview of the VSCS. His report has been widely distributed and is posted on the Select Committee's website. Dr. Page recommended beginning with a set of principles and goals, and allowing the future vision to

emerge from deliberation around those points. Dr. James McHugh, a political science professor at University of Akron, has a long-standing interest in the VSCS. Voluntarily, he drafted a report with a vision for the future of the VSCS. The report provides a history of the system and recommendations for the next phase.

Organizational renewal is often conceptualized along a continuum of change versus stability. Some plans favor change while others favor stability. Typically, future-vision plans call for transformational change while plans operating within stable social conditions call for maintaining stability.

The three draft plans for the future of public-access higher education in Vermont that are annotated above represent a range of organization renewal from transformative change (*Uniting Vermont*), to moderate change (NCHEMS), to little change (*VSCS Thrive*).

Transformative Change	Moderate Change	Little Change
Unified Mission New Structure Worthy Funding Executive-level consolidation to reduce expenses Morally Benevolent	Compounded Missions Tweaked Structure Little New Funding Broad austerity approach to reducing expenses Morally Agnostic	Traditional Missions Conventional Structure Much More Funding Moderately reduces expenses through elimination of CO Morally Just

Each of the three plans calls for increased funding to support public-access higher education, and each recommends expense reduction through operational efficiencies. Each of the three plans declares that a portion of the expense reduction should be realized through consolidation of executive and administrative operations. (It is noteworthy that the *VSC Forward* recommendations, instead, seek expense reduction through program elimination and reduction of services. Those recommendations do not mention a need to seek additional state funding.)

These plans give voice to citizens' aspirations for their future. We can hope, with confidence in our democratic social contract, that the result will be not just sustainable, but generative, inspiring, and worthy of our commitment.

APPENDIX B

Comparing Vermont State College Headcount to Tuition and Demographic Data

By: Greg Petrics

Executive Summary:

Between 2011 and 2020 there has been no statistically significant relationship between the number of Vermonters aged 18-24 and the headcount at the Vermont State College System (VSCS). In fact, a non-statistically significant negative relationship was observed suggesting that demographics are not likely explanatory of declining VSCS headcounts. On the other hand, a very strong relationship between the tuition charged and VSCS headcounts. This suggests that increases in tuition are more explanatory of declining headcounts than demographics. (See Figures 1 and 2 below.)

Full Text:

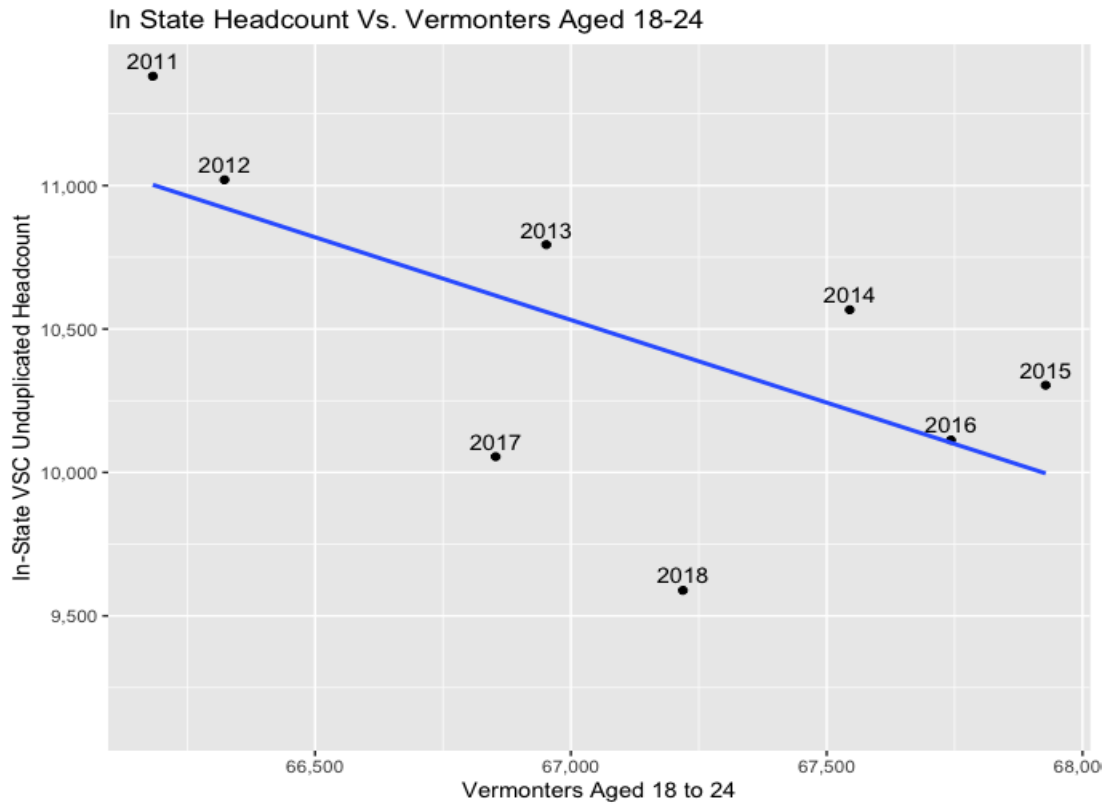
Since former-Vermont State College System (VSCS) Chancellor Spaulding released the so-called “white paper” in 2019, it has been widely circulated that the VSCS’s primary obstacle to success is declining demographics in the State of Vermont. If this were true, then one would expect to see a relationship between the number of college-aged Vermonters (18 to 24 years old) and the headcount at the VSCS. In particular, one would expect to see that a lower number of college-aged Vermonters would correspond to lower numbers of people attending the VSCS.

The exact opposite has been observed between 2011 and 2020.

Notably, the number of Vermonters aged 18 to 24 years old has remained relatively stable between 65,000 and 68,000. Furthermore, there has been no observed relationship between the number of Vermonters aged 18-24 and VSCS headcount. In fact, there is a weak negative relationship between the two variables, indicating that there is no relationship of note whatsoever. See figure 1 which shows the number of Vermonters aged 18-24 from 2011 to 2020 on the horizontal axis, and the VSCS headcount from 2011 to 2020 on the vertical axis.

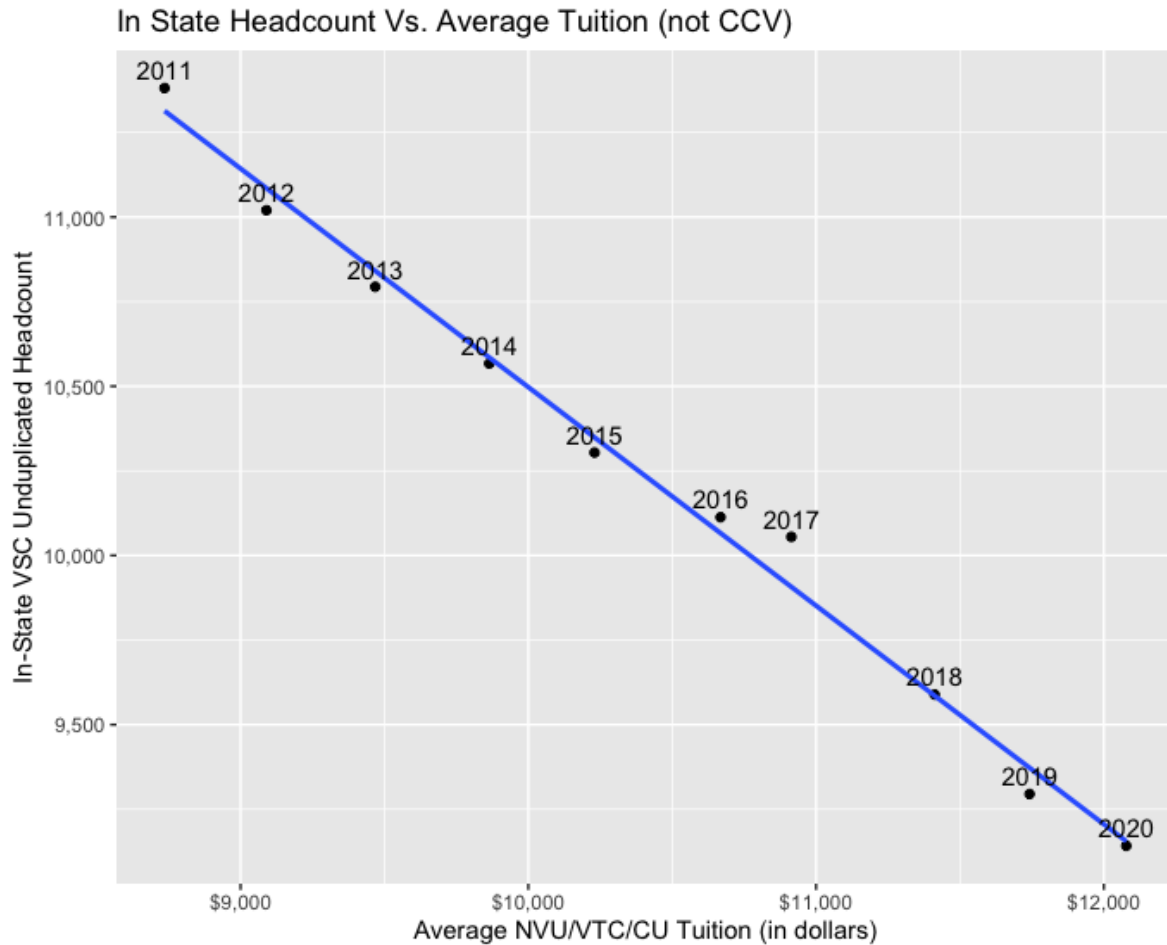
The graph below (Figure 1) illustrates a “statistically insignificant” negative relationship between Vermonters aged 18-24 and VSCS headcount. This weakly suggests that if the population of Vermonters aged 18-24 were to *rise*, then counterintuitively, VSCS headcounts would *decline*. Furthermore—and more importantly—it also suggests that demographic data is *not* a primary explanatory factor for the declining headcounts at the VSCS, and there is likely another explanatory variable.

Figure 1



One possible explanatory factor is the tuition charged by the institutions. Mathematically, the relationship is almost perfectly linear. As the tuition has risen between 2011 and 2020, the headcount is almost perfectly negatively related. See figure 2 which shows the average Northern Vermont University, Vermont Technical College and Castleton University tuitions on the horizontal axis, and the VSCS headcount on the vertical axis. The time frame is from 2011 to 2020.

Figure 2



The relationship is almost perfect, suggesting increasing tuition is a factor to the declining enrollments.

Notes:

- This study was done *post-hoc* (meaning “after the fact”), and it is not statically appropriate to infer causation. An experimental design is needed to infer causation.
- The demographic data was obtained from the Vermont Department of Health here: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/vital-records-population-data/vermont-population-estimates>
- The tuition and headcount data was obtained from the VSCS Sourcebooks for Institutional Data here: <https://www.vsc.edu/vsc-sourcebook-2011-2017/>
- CCV Tuition was omitted from the study because of the substantially different way tuition is charged (by the credit rather than by the semester) at CCV than at NVU, VTC and CU.

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