

Public comments for Higher Ed Committee, Nov 30, 2020

From: Susan Rand <srandyt@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 2:33 PM

To: higheredcommittee <higheredcommittee@leg.state.vt.us>

Subject: Brief Document for Select Committee on Higher Ed RE Nov 30th
NCHEMS Draft Report

Good afternoon,

Would you please share this brief document with the Committee prior to today's meeting?

Thank you and best regards,

Susan Rand

November 30, 2020

To NCHEMS staff and the Legislative Select Committee on the Future of Higher Education in Vermont:

The work you have accomplished in a short period of time is to be commended given the complexity and importance of the situation at hand. However, the draft report released today does not address several questions that arise from the information and recommendations you present. Aside from the widely understood need to increase State appropriations from decades of historically low support, there are three pressing questions that should be addressed:

1. What is the true cost savings that can be realized under your proposed restructure? Your estimate which is based solely on the difference between student costs at the VSC and similar institutions seems overly simplistic and lacks scientific data to support it. While it may be fair to assume that consolidation of institutions could eventually result in cost savings, the multiplier on which the recommendation is based is vague and speculative rendering it unworthy of such important decisions. Witness the recent consolidation of Johnson and Lyndon as NVU, which has yet to yield expected cost savings.
2. Why do you recommend consolidation under single accreditation and a new system name when the same steps can be accomplished without doing so? The recommendations and steps outlined as necessary to achieve efficient structural changes can all be accomplished under the current structure with the exception of employing a single faculty, thus making it easier to terminate faculty with greater ease. It would seem that the same set of transformative changes must occur regardless of preferred structure and that VSC leadership must make difficult decisions in order to achieve necessary levels of differentiation between campuses in all cases. Additionally, restructuring under a new system name such as Vermont State University adds considerable confusion particularly to NVU as it continues its transformation from the merger of Johnson and Lyndon. If the only true difference between remaining in the current structure and moving to single accreditation is the greater control over faculty and that is a prime goal of restructuring, why not make a more subtle change of the VSC to VSCU: Vermont State Colleges

& Universities, and allow the existing institutions to better retain their identities as they work to become more differentiated from one another?

3. How will the existing administration and Board of Trustees lead through change? It is extremely doubtful that the current administration and Board of Trustees are capable of navigating the structural changes that are required. Your recent draft report highlights the need for the Board to “play a more active oversight role than it has in the past” and states that your recommendations “will likely take the board out of its comfort zone.” Given the Board’s heavy reliance on the Chancellor for direction, would it not make sense to recommend a significant transformation in the composition of the Board? And, with no disrespect to the current Chancellor intended, her appointment and decisions over the past eight months have caused a high level of distrust of the VSC administration among students, staff, faculty and alumni, not to mention unaffiliated citizens. If transformational change is to be successfully implemented and achieved, it will require highly experienced and collaborative leadership.

Thank you for your continued efforts, the outcome of which is critical to the economic growth, cultural vitality, and social fabric of Vermont’s future.

Sincerely,
Susan Rand

From: Olson, Linda J. <linda.olson@castleton.edu>
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 3:16 PM
To: higheredcommittee <higheredcommittee@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: Response to NCHEMS Report Draft

Good Afternoon,

Attached you will find the Vermont State Colleges Labor Task Force response to the NCHEMS draft. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to meet with the Task Force.

Linda Olson

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**Vermont State College’s Labor Task Force Response to National Center for
Higher Education Management Systems Draft Report
11.30.20**

The Vermont State College System Labor Task Force (VSC LTF) has six central areas of concern in the Draft Recommendations for the Legislative Select Committee on the future of Higher Education in Vermont prepared by National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). The VSC LTF is prepared to address and expand on these issues with the Legislative Select Committee on the future of Higher Education, but we have also prepared a brief document outlining some of our concerns.

- **Work-force preparation:** Conversation within the Select Committee and the NCHEMS draft report indicates a desire to shift the mission of the public college system toward job-training and work-force development. The NCHEMS draft report recommends that the Community College of Vermont (CCV) should become the principal provider of sub-baccalaureate workforce-oriented education and training (p. 10). The report includes Charts 5 and 6 as supporting evidence and references the McClure Foundation Report “Pathways to Promising Careers.”

There are three obvious problems with movement:

1. The VSCS already enacts strong career-preparation and has plans to expand these endeavors through careful planning and expense monitoring (see NVU Strong). For example, of the 62 listings in the McClure Report, 3 are at the doctoral and 13 are at the high school + training level, 3 are industry apprenticeships, and 5 are industry certificates. Training programs for these positions are available for lower expense than a college-credit system would permit. Of the remaining 38 jobs, Vermonters can already gain suitable training through existing VSC programs.
 2. In order to operate most efficiently under the guise of life-long learning, the entire VSCS must coalesce into a unified whole-system, the Vermont State University. Separating and isolating “sub-baccalaureate workforce-oriented education and training” to one branch of the VSCS perpetuates the balkanization of post-secondary, lifelong learning that is one of the fundamental obstacles of the existing structure.
 3. As noted by many scholars of higher education, the jobs of the future do not exist in the present. As such, numerous reports have concluded that the best preparation for the future is a program that provides citizens with breadth and depth of disciplinary content along with specific skills. Instead of reducing the public-access higher education system to a job training program, we should strive to transform it into an agile network for career preparation, civic engagement, community service, and personal well-being.
- **Shared Governance:** The VSC LTF agrees with NCHEMS that there needs to be “robust Board development program” to educate the Board about their roles and obligations to the VSCS. The Board has essentially become a rubber stamp for the Chancellor’s Office and this has had disastrous implications for the VSCS. The proposed campus closures announced by Chancellor Spaulding is one example. We do believe though that a significant part of the problem is that the Board lacks representation from those of us who do the day to day work of the college. We propose:

1. Having four representatives from the staff and faculty on the board. There is already a student representative on the Board. We believe that having faculty and staff representatives will give the Board added insight about how their decisions will impact the campuses, the students, and our ability to serve our public mission to the state of Vermont.
 2. We also think term limits on Board members would enable new ideas and perspectives on the future of the VSCS.
 3. Governance should be enhanced with a Faculty and Staff Senate to balance deliberations between the Board of Trustees and the Executive Team.
- **Unification with the Community College of Vermont (CCV):** The task force rejects the idea that combining CCV with other VSC institutions would limit its flexibility and affordability as a member institution. To the contrary, it will offer greater access to resources both intellectual and physical currently unavailable to CCV students and faculty alike.
1. The VSC LTF would also like to note that the primary reason that CCV is a more affordable model than the other colleges is because it has an entirely part-time faculty. In fact, it is the only community college in the country with no full-time faculty. It is the contention of the VSC LTF that this model discriminates against CCV students because they have no access to full-time faculty. It also discriminates against the part-time faculty who teach there because they are not paid a livable wage.
 2. Incorporating CCV with the other VSC institutions under the umbrella of VSU would greatly ease transfer of credentials from CCV to the other institutions because there will be attention given to educational requirements of all courses at all schools.
 3. Having CCV as part of the VSU will not alter CCV's original mission or its ability to partner with business to provide stackable, non-degree certificates. It will, however, enhance the ability of CCV to deliver all their programs to students, while maintaining the ability to withstand the constantly changing needs of employers because they will have more resources available to meet changing those needs creatively, nimbly and without substantial reinvestment.
- **Branding:** Each campus must retain its individuality and identity and be able to promote its unique attributes. The recommendation to form a "Vermont State University" is aimed at unification at the systems level: To make the systemic structural changes that will increase efficiency of services and enhance transferability across all campuses.
- **Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) recommendations:** The VSC LTF is deeply concerned that there is nothing in NCHEMS report that will limit VSAC portability.
1. As we indicated in our report 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 no affordable option.
 2. NCHEMS report talks about increasing funding to VSAC, but there is no mention about changing this policy of completely unrestricted portability. This means that even more of our tax dollars could go out of state. The lack of state support historically, combined with unrestricted portability of VSAC funds has been a recipe for disaster for our public colleges and universities. There is a reason every other

state either does not allow portability of funds or places significant restrictions on them.

➤ **Appropriations:** As with the data in the Labor Task Force Proposal, *Uniting Vermont*, the NCHEMS draft report indicates that an increase in routine state appropriations will be necessary:

1. NCHEMS recommends \$10-15M in “additional ongoing state institutional appropriations” to manage continuous improvements and another \$5M to improve affordability. This amounts to an increase of \$15-20M annually. NCHEMS also recommends a \$15-20M investment to facilitate a change in the System.
2. The Labor Task Force identified \$14M in annual expenses for executive and upper-level administration services that are duplicated across the System with, for example, four Executive Teams and a separate Chancellor’s Office and other copied upper-level office operations across the five entities. Reducing the duplicative operations at this level should garner a significant savings.
3. Taken together, a significant increase in annual appropriations partnered with a significant reduction in executive and upper-level administrative expenses, as per the *Uniting Vermont* proposal, should be primarily and directly targeted for tuition reduction as a means of increasing access to public higher education for Vermonters. Indeed, as an immediate step, a portion of the \$15-20M that NCHEMS recommends for facilitating change in the System should be immediately directed to tuition reduction.
4. Essentially, the three problems with the current System are (1) the tuition is too high, (2) the Board of Trustees and executive Teams do not enact state-of-the-art shared governance, and (3) the four institutions of the VSCS need to be united into a functional network in order to enhance access and quality. See the Labor Task Force Action Steps.

Conclusions: In the world of higher education, students are not the Point of Sale, they are the reason for our existence. We cannot be truly student driven as long as we are so heavily dependent on each student’s tuition. We, the members of the Vermont State Colleges Labor Task Force, have used the belief that the Vermont Public Higher Education system exists for the public good, and not for the benefit of the corporation, to guide our work for a United Vermont.

Following this time of COVID-19, we are leaving a world where the burden is on the individual, and entering a world where the burden is shared by all of us in our communities, from local to global. This is also true of the future we envision for Public Higher Education in Vermont. The burden must be better shared by the state of Vermont, keeping our students and our communities in the forefront, being guided by a commitment to access, quality, and affordability, and fulfilling our promise for the benefit of Vermont.

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From: Susan Rand <srandvt@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 3:50 PM
To: [higheredcommittee](mailto:higheredcommittee@leg.state.vt.us) <higheredcommittee@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: Question for Livestream Mtg Nov 30

What are the true cost savings that can be realized under your proposed restructure?
Your estimate, which is based solely on the difference between student costs at the VSC and similar institutions, seems overly simplistic and lacks scientific data to support it. While it may be fair to assume that consolidation of institutions could eventually result in cost savings, the multiplier on which the recommendation is based is vague and speculative rendering it unworthy of such important decisions. Witness the recent consolidation of Johnson and Lyndon as NVU, which has yet to yield expected cost savings.

Thank you, Susan Rand

From: McGough, David J. <david.mcgough@northernvermont.edu>
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 4:35 PM
To: [higheredcommittee](mailto:higheredcommittee@leg.state.vt.us) <higheredcommittee@leg.state.vt.us>
Cc: Olson, Linda J. <linda.olson@castleton.edu>; Walsh, Beth R. <brw07250@nvu.vsc.edu>
Subject: Comment for 11.30.20 Mtg of the Select Committee: #1

Per the 11.30.20 draft of the NCHEMS Report

Page 8, Section 3, Paragraph 1.

Please fix the wording.

Report wording:

"Labor Task Force urging the **consolidation of the four existing institutions into a Vermont State University under single accreditation and the **elimination** of the Chancellor's Office"**

Actually, the LTF plan proposes the following:

"Labor Task Force urging the unification of the four existing institutions into a Vermont State University under single accreditation and the replacement of the four institutions' Executive Teams and the Chancellor's Office with a single President and Executive Team for the unified University."

djm

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From: Walsh, Beth R. <brw07250@nvu.vsc.edu>
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 5:04 PM
To: higheredcommittee <higheredcommittee@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: comment on Select Committee meeting

I would like to add that a reduction in tuition will likely increase the enrollment of Vermont students who will attend one of our institutions and students who will remain in Vermont, rather than go out of state where the cost is less. Honestly, if we cannot lower tuition enough to make us more affordable for Vermonters then what are we doing? We will be right back here, looking for solutions, if Vermont continues to charge the highest public college tuition in the country.

Beth R. Walsh, M.Ed.
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President, Vermont State Colleges United Professionals
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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. ~ Margaret Mead

Set a Zoom appointment here: <https://NVUJohnson.as.me/BethWalsh>
Post jobs and internships at www.CollegeCentral.com/VSC
www.NorthernVermont.edu/Careers

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