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VSCS Thrive Policy Recommendations

We seek the following:

1. Increased state investment in VSC in order to substantially reduce in state student tuition for Vermonters.
2. Dissolution of physical Chancellor's office (with its annual budget of approximately \$8 million dollars). Since 2012, the OC budget has increased 41.7% and its staff increased by 21%. We must scale back the only non-revenue generating office in the VSCS.
3. Chancellery functions carried out throughout the VSCS (allows for consolidation of back functions, such as HR, payroll).
4. The implementation of the "strong President" model (what Colorado was formerly using) – VSCS Presidents would fulfill Chancellor duties on a rotating 2-3 year Chancellor position OR Chancellor position carried out by a "Council of Presidents, with a rotating Chair position.
5. Chancellor's office functions supported by separate state appropriations, eliminating the need for the schools to individually finance the OC out of their budget, saving approximately \$1.6 million from each institutions' budget. This would mirror the process in PA, in which the OC has its own state appropriations and oversight from the legislature. The Chancellor's office would then have to justify any increases to the OC budget through the legislature directly as opposed to raising the campus's "payment." Currently, we believe that our OC budget is grossly out of proportion with the size of our state system. PASSHE's OC budget is approximately the same as the VSCS's OC budget, while overseeing 14 universities, thousands of degree programs, and over a hundred thousand students. (PASSHE has consolidated a few back-office functions but have maintained regional accreditations, regional administrations for the campuses).
6. System-wide re-branding to the Vermont State University system with the institutions retaining their autonomy and individual regional identities (Example: SUNY). This would result in a reversal of the Lyndon-Johnson merge.
7. Retention of separate regional accreditations for VSC institutions retaining their separate Presidents, CFOs, and marketing/admissions teams. We seek a decrease in administrative bloat and believe that based on the evidence, a single-accreditation and system-wide approach will not reduce administrative bloat and will increase the need for mid-level management while decreasing faculty and instructional expenditures (see Connecticut system for example of increased overall cost due to system-wide approach and stream-lining instruction).
8. New technologies for teaching must be decoupled from intentions to cut labor costs. On-line and telepresence courses must be offered to satisfy a need and demand from Vermonters, not as a default due to austerity policy nor as a pie-in-the-sky SNHU-lite dream. We also must be prepared, as a system, for collective student backlash to remote and on-line learning – a backlash that has been brought forward due to the pandemic and evidenced in a variety of mediums. Considering this recent social and political history, it is not the time to implement the use of wholly on-line offerings for any aspect of a campus-based general education.
9. Rebuilding and reinvesting in the campuses and their academic programs. We must re-invest in the liberal arts/humanities as these programs have been greatly reduced over the last twenty years (to the point of almost extinction at Lyndon). These programs foster and promote active civic engagement. During a pandemic that has exposed inequalities across a multitude of our institutions, it is unconscionable that any VSCS administration would consider the wholesale elimination of history, political science, sociology, and the humanities at any of our public campuses. These are not subfields; these are the very foundations of a democratic society.

10. Accountability for our leadership in the system. The legislature must create guidelines and mechanisms for administrative oversight. We propose a comprehensive independent audit, including itemized budgets for each VSCS campus (separating NVU into its three distinct campuses). We ask that the legislature maintain a keen eye towards major restructuring activities through the separate education committees, ensuring that decision making is shared in a much more transparent and vertically and laterally integrated manner.

VSCS Thrive Vision Statement

We have heard the call for a “twenty-first-century” educational system, to use the Vermont legislature’s terms, that ensures a “high-quality, affordable, sustainable future, a future that is workforce-connected and robust in its online capacities.” But we have already spent the first fifth of this twenty-first century aiming almost exclusively in that direction. When Bob Clarke was appointed chancellor more than 20 years ago, having served as president of VTC where, for example, he developed the CREATE program to serve IBM, he brought that focus directly to the forefront of the VSC as a whole, while making considerable changes to consolidate and centralize all the colleges as a single-focused institution. Tim Donovan, who had served as president of CCV, followed Bob Clarke and brought that distinct focus to the system as a whole. Jeb Spaulding, whose experience in education was largely as director of career and workforce development at the Vermont Department of Education, brought a continued emphasis on the centrality of CCV and a concerted effort at consolidation and unification, at the expense of the range and individuality of the colleges, not to mention their sustainability.

There is no denying that CCV (like VTC) plays a decidedly valuable role and serves a crucial audience in Vermont’s higher-education landscape. However, such a role is definitely not the totality of what the VSCS as a whole should and must do to serve the needs of higher education in Vermont. Frankly, continuously pursuing the trajectory of workforce development at the expense of a broader and more robust range of educational opportunities and experiences—all while state funding has continued to decline, forcing a rise in tuition—is far more responsible than demographic declines for the situation in which we now find ourselves. To do more of the same will surely continue the decline in enrollments as Vermont and out-of-state students look for educational opportunities elsewhere, which will eventually necessitate closing colleges and devastating Vermont communities both economically and culturally.

Moreover, the objection to an exclusive focus on workforce development for all of the VSC colleges is not merely that it has proven ineffective as a strategy and served to narrow education and to strip away more viable, productive educational models for the VSC as a whole, but also that it perpetuates and reinforces significant and destructive inequities of opportunity and access based on class, race, gender, and even geography, inequities that have been massively exacerbated by the neo-liberal economic, social, and taxation policies of the last 40 years and more. For years now, our public colleges have been cut, squeezed, trimmed, neglected, overstuffed, misdirected, kludged, and patched. As a logical result, they do their core educational jobs less well than they used to—in a period when society needs them more than ever. We can’t patch the public systems anymore. We need to reconstruct them. (Newfield, 2106, p. 305).

For several decades, business, educational, and political leaders in our state have decided that mass educational quality is out of reach for Vermonters. We seek to overturn this quite anti-public phase in our collective history—resulting in the crowning of the VSCS as the most anti-public public university system in the country—and to reconstruct our Vermont public universities. American public universities have been noted as failing the current and future generations—requiring students and their families to take on more debt for an education that is now considered necessary while spending too little on the core activities of teaching and research (Newfield, 2016). This devolutionary funding model is even more evident in Vermont. Vermont public higher education funding has ranked dead last in the country, in-state tuition is amongst the highest in the nation, and instructional spending is far too low—VSCS four-year universities have ranked far

below the average public institution, below the average private institution, and far too close to the average for-profit institution in instructional expenditures for every tuition dollar garnered, with NVU ranking last in the VSCS (Hall, 2019). We have effectively defunded higher education in the state of Vermont to its current condition—strikingly anti-public and continuously sliding towards privatization and corporatization. We cannot move forward as a public university system from here. Too strong an emphasis on workforce development and on-line education will not change our anti-public status—it will cement such.

We challenge the notion that we can continue to compensate state disinvestment through shifting the funding burden from public to private sources, such as increasing tuition and student fees, while expanding private corporate influence into our public colleges. According to Newfield (2016), such a reliance on private revenues subordinates the university system to corporate-sector principles and practices while the ethos of corporatization hides the non-market values of the university as a public good—effectively degrading the mission of the university. The most obvious effect of this is students paying more to receive less. The rejection of this ethos by the general public is illustrated in Professor Greg Petrics’ 2020 analysis of the negative relationship between VSCS student enrollment and tuition increases. The general public also rejected this ethos during the September 2019 Board of Trustees meeting—students demanding enhanced educational opportunities and an end to outsourced on-line education (See Appendix B).

Considering the emphasis of the NVU Strong! Committee and VSCS legislative committee on expanding on-line education, we assert that any attempt to place students who seek a campusbased education into on-line courses, due to outright policy or as a default due to a lack of campus-based course offerings, is unjust, exacerbates educational inequalities, and must be rejected. On-line courses have been used as an effort to reduce instructional costs without decreasing the quality of instruction, but this approach has failed (Newfield, 2016). Jaggar and Xu (2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2016) found that students who took on-line courses early in their educational career were significantly less likely to return to school in following terms. Furthermore, students who enrolled in a higher proportion of on-line courses were significantly less likely to graduate, earn a certificate, or transfer to a four-year institution. Most strikingly, while Jaggar and Xu found that all students in the study experienced decreases in their performance in on-line courses, some struggled more than others: males, younger students, Black students, and students with lower grade-point averages. A similar study of student performance found that students’ likelihood of completion or passing with a C or better were lower for on-line courses than those provided in face-to-face classroom settings (Hart, Friedman, and Hill, 2015). Columbia University researchers used a dataset containing approximately 500,000 courses taken by community and technical college students in the state of Washington and found that “performance gaps between key demographic groups already observed in face-to-face classrooms (e.g., gaps between male and female students, gaps between White and ethnic minority students) are exacerbated in on-line courses. This is troubling from an equity perspective” (Newfield, 2016). This speaks clearly to the concern we have regarding the NVU Strong! Committee’s recommendations for students to complete their general education requirements and lower level major requirements via NVU Online or CCV (largely on-line).

We also reject the use and expansion of our campus-based resources to create the wholly distance only institution, NVU Online, complete with its own marketing and administrative and tuition structure. On-line institutions have been found to have one-third the number of full-time faculty compared to community colleges and one-eighth of the proportion provided by public research universities (Newfield, 2016). Student-faculty ratios were also found to be the highest (worst) at entirely on-line schools, which also had the worst graduation rates—worse even than for-profits overall (Newfield, 2016). We assert that any need for emerging technologies can be provided by

the campus-based faculty and should not be delivered through an all administrative-run enterprise, which cannot adequately assess the academic quality of the content or delivery as faculty specialists in the disciplines can. In sum, dependence on on-line courses has not been found to reduce costs due to their poor retention, completion, and graduation rates (Newfield, 2016).

We envision reconstructing the VSCS as a public university system. We draw upon and extend Fabricant and Brier's 2016 proposals for our vision for Vermont's higher education:

1. We believe while investment in public higher education in Vermont should grow dramatically; unequal public investment by race, class, gender, or sexuality is not acceptable; and state investment must be greater in institutions educating the most academically, economically, and even geographically challenged. We assert that any attempt to limit the educational opportunities of students in the northern third of the state is an attempt to constrain the education of those who are most geographically and economically challenged. This cannot be tolerated.
2. Public higher education cannot be financed by student debt because debt financing for a public education—for those least able to afford it—is a form of regressive taxation and benefits the financial industry alone at the expense of those who can least afford it.
3. We celebrate new forms of technology for teaching, but such must be utilized to meet both the needs and demands of Vermont citizens. Distance education, such as on-line or telepresence courses, must be decoupled from exploitive intentions to shrink labor costs or generate profits. We reject any proposal that explicitly places campus-based students into on-line courses as a default to complete their requirements.

We extend these proposals to include the following:

4. We envision comprehensive education provided to NVU students with a renewed emphasis on and commitment to teaching in intensive, personalized smaller groups—a step away from cost-cutting attempts to carry out instruction by an even larger proportion of parttime instructors, chiefly on-line.
5. Recognizing that the future of our state, our nation, and our world depends on a citizenry that is engaged, informed, and critical thinking, we champion the national and international efforts to expand MESH (Media literacy, Ethics, Sociology, and History) and SHAPE (the UK's re-investment in Social Sciences, Humanities, and the Arts for People and the Economy). We should re-commit to this education, recognizing that if we do not give these fields equal attention, we may create technical specialists who are lacking in their capacity for democratic citizenship. In addition, we seek to amplify the research that suggests that graduates of social science and humanities degrees are well-positioned for economic downturns, possess creative and analytical capacity that promotes career flexibility, and are found to earn at least as much as their peers in STEM fields ten years post-graduation (The British Academy, 2020). We emphasize that program consolidation and elimination limit the ability of our schools to attract and retain students—both in state and out-of-state.

NVU should expand its ability to offer intensive, personalized teaching, rather than emphasize maximum on-line course offerings and degree programs. COVID-19 has indeed disrupted higher education—in many senses, the forced transition to remote education has highlighted how committed students are to their in-person instructional experiences. Moreover, education during a pandemic has revealed what many teachers and students already believed—that on-line education exacerbates inequalities and is more difficult for students who struggle academically and

financially. This collective understanding is now mainstream, with pieces in the New York Times, The Atlantic, and the Wall Street Journal (See Appendix A), and class action lawsuits against universities for not providing the quality academic instruction the students had paid for—the underlying assertion being that their remote education was not comparable to face-to-face learning.

Intensive, personalized teaching has been a vital element of the Lyndon and Johnson campuses, with little to no emphasis on such as an asset by our former Chancellor nor NVU administration. While students in other public systems largely have classroom experiences of lecture halls with 200+ students and may have only a single course in their undergraduate career with under 15 students, we are already providing intensive and personalized instruction, which had once been a hallmark of our college marketing and recruitment to draw students. Rather than try to focus on efficiencies via on-line and telepresence courses, we need to maintain and amplify this ability of our small state schools—particularly notable as the small private liberal arts colleges close. One of the most important investments a college can make for student outcomes and achievement is increasing the amount spent on instruction—providing robust course offerings and opportunities (The Century Foundation, 2019). By increasing instructional spending, student retention increases, and students are more likely to graduate on time or early. In addition, higher instructional expenditures are related to higher earnings for student’s post-graduation. We recognize that the students of today and tomorrow are qualitatively different than previous generations of students. We assert that the quality and breadth of education an institution delivers will be more important than ever—socially significant as we navigate conflict and unrest but also practically important to the sustainability of universities as the first waves of second-generation student-loan debtors, likely to be more cautious and suspicious of acquiring student-loan debt themselves, approach college-age. With a focus on intensive, personalized instruction, NVU and the VSC can demonstrate their authenticity and commitment to quality, thereby attracting students who have been turned off by pandemic on-line education and the high cost of tuition. Many academic and business leaders assert that the future will rely on us capturing the value of SHAPE disciplines themselves, as well as how such complements and works with STEM fields to create a healthy and functioning future. These extraordinary times show us just how crucial SHAPE subjects are in understanding our communities and their interconnectedness, creating functional and ethical economies, learning from our past and applying this to our future, and realizing the need for a sustainable, healthy environment while effectively communicating for change.

What will NVU, the VSCS, and the Legislature commit to for educating our future students? An education that reinforces existing economic and educational disparities while pandering to local businesses—increasing inequalities for our rural and economically disadvantaged students? Or a deep, rich education that fosters democratic participation, civic responsibility, and is responsive to the needs of its citizens?

The responsibility of the VSCS is not solely to produce or train workers for the economic development of our communities, but is rather to provide access to and support for the opportunity for our citizens to undertake a fully developed, expansive, and transformative education to advance themselves and to serve the economic, social, and cultural development of our communities, our region, and the world. We can do better than we have done for the past twenty years of narrowing and limiting, especially now in this national and global climate—manifested in massive protests and demonstrations driven largely by young people—that so clearly needs a larger and fuller vision of who we are as a local community, as well as a national and international one. Clearly, such opportunity and education are not only what our students want, but what they need and deserve.

What we need for our “re-visioning” of the VSCS is a true re-imagining of what we can and should do to serve the educational needs of Vermont—a re-imagining that is expansive, comprehensive, that includes the needs of any and all Vermonters—from those who need retraining for employment, to those who want to create new, vital, undreamed of careers and businesses in Vermont, to those who now leave the state in search of the kind of education that will open a world of opportunities and abilities that they don’t even know exist. Truly, we cannot do less and successfully meet our mission.

To reach this goal, of course, will require enormous changes, the most important of which is a fundamental re-visioning of how we understand and present to our constituents the nature, purpose, and design of education across the VSCS. The articulation of that new vision and future will then have to be taken by both leadership and stakeholders to the legislature and to the broader community to reverse the last forty and more years of underfunding the VSCS, so that the legislature fulfills its statutory responsibility to fund the VSCS “in whole or in substantial part.” We must conceive of and represent the broad range of what the VSCS can and should do as a vital investment—one that has an extraordinary return—in our communities and our state.

The future of the Vermont State Colleges, individually and as a system, is ultimately dependent on one thing above all others: a demonstrated commitment from the State of Vermont to fulfill their statutory responsibility to fund higher education in Vermont “in whole or in substantial part.” If there is one thing that can be said for Jeb Spaulding’s proposal to close three campuses to “save” the VSC, it is that it reduced the question to its simplest, barest outlines: at current funding levels, you can either have the colleges or not. Clearly, the public outcry against closure demonstrated that the people of Vermont, particularly the communities that rely on and host the colleges threatened with closure, want those colleges to remain at the economic, social, and cultural heart of their communities to serve all of Vermont and beyond. But Spaulding’s proposal also did enormous damage by placing in stark relief the underlying fragility of the colleges’ viability to ensure prospective students that they would exist to serve those very students and their communities.

No changes that the VSCS outlines for the future—changes that will take years to yield results, as the consolidation of Lyndon and Johnson into NVU has clearly demonstrated—will change that perception for prospective students and their families. We cannot expect them to invest their money and their futures in the colleges or the system if they cannot see clearly that the State of Vermont is willing to make the same commitment to the future of higher education in Vermont specifically in the form of funding the VSCS “in whole or substantial part.” With that funding commitment, however, the VSCS can not only reduce tuition to make the cost of an education for Vermonters and others much more affordable and appealing, but also reinvest in, reinvigorate, restore, and re-imagine the kind of fully developed, expansive, and transformative education to serve the economic, social, and cultural development of our communities, our region, and the world—in sum, the kind of wide-ranging, comprehensive educational opportunities, from CCV, VTC, and the campus colleges, that twenty-first century students are calling for and that the twenty-first century actually needs.

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Appendix A: Media Concerning Online Learning

(2020.4.9) What Students Are Saying About Remote Learning: Teenage comments in response to our recent writing prompts, and an invitation to join the ongoing conversation. New York Times. Received from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/learning/what-students-are-saying-aboutremote-learning.html>

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Concerns regarding the VSC/NVU and NVU-Online

We urge you to read and consider the below statements regarding Northern Vermont University's entirely on-line school, NVU Online.

Brief background

NVU Online currently operates "outside of the state contract" utilizing non-bargaining unit labor and is marketed to out-of-state students. NVU Online operates outside of NVU Department of Academic Affairs – what this means is that campus-based faculty have very little to no opportunities for input, course selection for online delivery, the hiring of instructors, and no review of student outcomes/assessment materials. Students have protested this entity, concerned that they were being forced into on-line courses and/or that NVU Online was supplemented with their campus-based funds.

NVU Online – state appropriations

We have been told that NVU needs NVU Online because "it makes money." Budget documents from 2015-2018 released to the Faculty Federation via an information request show that over \$1,000,000 of Johnson State College's state appropriation has been directed into NVU Online's budget for each year examined. Of primary concern, it is difficult to determine if NVU Online is actually revenue-generating – would this ring true without the million-dollar state appropriation? Would it be revenue-generating if marketing and advertising included itemized or separate budgets for each campus rather than a singular "pooled marketing budget"? According to Faculty Federation President Linda Olson, it is dubious that it is indeed revenue-generating.

Most alarming, JSC and Lyndon State College have received identical appropriations for at least the last decade. This does not appear to be a case of Johnson receiving additional or surplus funding to run a separate online school. Instead, Johnson leadership (now NVU) had chosen to invest about 22% of their state appropriations into the outside of state contract entity. In 2016, this meant that the Johnson campus was receiving approximately \$3,720,000 of the \$4,750,000 appropriated whereas NVU Online received \$1,300,000. NVU Online's total revenue averages between 4 and 5 million depending on the year – thus, the state appropriations being directed is a very significant amount of the on-line's school's overall budget. Therefore, an in-state campus-based student receives an education in which Vermont contributed 16.4% of his or her campus's budget. An NVU Online student experiences an education in which the state of Vermont contributes approximately 21%. In other words, a Johnson student is receiving LESS in state subsidy than an NVU Online student (who could be from Florida). This data was prior to the two tuition decreases NVU Online received in 2019 while the campus-based tuition increased. Since Johnson's distance ed program has been running for decades, it's troublesome to think of how many millions of state tax dollars have been invested directly into an outside of state contract entity. At this time, we do not know if any NVU Lyndon monies have been directed into NVU Online.

A researcher from a national education policy think tank has referred to this information regarding NVU-Online students receiving more in-state subsidy than other VSC students as "startling and disturbing." Currently, policy researchers are unsure of whether or not there are any comparable examples of state higher ed institutions functioning in this manner – using state funds to create and operate a separate on-line school that is outside of the bargaining unit/union contract (providing incentive to effectively outsource the state university instructional labor). This practice is currently being explored further with

national union organizations (AAUP and AFT). Please note that while there are numerous examples of large public-private universities creating separate on-line entities (such as UVM's distance learning, Penn State World Campus, eCornell, etc.), these are not universities that are a part of their state higher ed system. Penn State University is not a part of PASSHE in Pennsylvania just as UVM is not a part of the VSC here. In addition, these universities are very large with equally large endowments and have the "start-up" funds to do so. Within our communities, many have asked if this was the intention behind unification – to request the state for "re-branding monies" that have effectively been used to create a separate on-line entity.

Is there a need for outsourcing?

To serve our campus-based students with on-line offerings and/or attract and retain non-traditional students who may need on-line offerings, we do not need to create a separate on-line school. Many states, including New York and North Carolina, successfully provide their students with a single website that has consolidated all state institutions' on-line offerings so that students can easily search, find, and register for the on-line courses that they need, regardless of which state institution is their home campus. This is a low-cost, student-centered method and does not outsource state labor to provide these offerings. It results in easy credit transfer for the students and requires very few institutional resources, other than campus-based faculty providing on-line offerings at a consistent rate. This is not what NVU Online does. Instead of permitting campus-based faculty to increase (or maintain) their on-line offerings for cross-state appeal, campus-based courses (on-line or face-to-face) are experiencing cuts while NVU Online course offerings continue to grow using non-unionized (and cheaper) labor. NVU Online also continues to expand its need for institutional administrative resources for recruiting students and program management. Simultaneously, NVU Online student enrollment continues to decline (per numbers in Fall 2019). Effectively, administrative policy functions in a manner that propels campus-based students into taking NVU Online courses. This practice is what most people would refer to as "union-busting" and privatization.

To illustrate what this looks like in practice, at Lyndon, a hiring freeze for Anthropology, Sociology, and Political Science means that any student wishing or needing these courses must take them through NVU Online. At Johnson, a "hybrid" CRJ degree program has been offered to their campus students solely through NVU Online. Please see NVU-J's "Hybrid" Criminal Justice degree for this example of outsourcing. This degree should be offered by a minimum of one full-time faculty member, with several supporting local part-time adjuncts. This is a full-time faculty member who would have likely re-located to the greater Johnson area, who would currently be shopping at our local stores, paying local taxes, and who may or may not have children (or future children) participating in our local schools and community. This hybrid CRJ program is for our local students and yet, instead of hiring a faculty member to live and work here, we are hiring part-time non-unionized low-cost instructors, many of which are located out of state. Any additional continuation of this trend will perpetuate this impact and harm further.

Furthermore, the lack of an anthropologist, sociologist, and political scientist at Lyndon impacts the campus as a whole. This not only limits our ability to provide a well-rounded inclusive curriculum to all students but from a practical standpoint, significantly limits our students' abilities to easily fulfill their general education requirements. These non-hires, course cuts, and program archiving result in students needing NVU Online if they wish to learn about these subjects (or complete their general education credits). This can be extrapolated across all academic programs. This is a clear example of outsourcing – replacing local union members with out-of-state non-union members being paid at below the regional market rate. Dean of Distance Education, Dr. Bobbi Jo Carter, in her testimony to the Labor Board in 2018-2019, stated that she expected this practice to continue.

Financial Risk

There are several compounding factors that intersect to construct risk. The first listed here is a statement from Dr. Hunter at the NECHE (accreditation body) site visit:

"The Progress Report of February 2019 describes ambitious enrollment goals for the period of FY2020 through FY 2024. Undergraduate enrollment will increase through out-of-state gains and in-state declines. Graduate enrollment, both in- and out-of-state, will increase. NVU Online will grow in-state and 208% out-of-state and Early College will grow. In *toto*, the goal is for headcount to change by 98 in-state and 330 out-of-state over the five-year period....Demographic changes, the evolving role of technology in higher education, and competing demands for state resources play into an increasingly competitive marketplace.

The evaluator has some concern regarding the ambitious enrollment plan given its central importance in revenue generation. The enrollment increases are essential to realizing revenue needed to address staffing issues and provide increased student opportunities envisioned as a central pillar of unification."*(From Dr. Susan Hunter, p. 6 of Evaluator's Report of Unification – my emphasis in paragraph).*

Provost Atkins was asked at a Chairs meeting if the 208% NVU Online projected out-of-state growth was derived from market-based research. According to participants of the meeting, Provost Atkins answered no. In addition, administration has stated that research indicates that most students select an online school within 100 miles of their home. We know that we have much regional pressure there, particularly regarding SNHU. As SNHU is frequently discussed, and was a component of the former Chancellor's white paper, it is imperative to note that SNHU is ranked as the fourth highest, nationally, in their online advertising, spending \$11,700,000 during a six-month period during August 2016-January 2017 alone (See: <https://tcf.org/content/report/much-education-students-getting-tuition-dollar/>). A new report based on Federal tax records from 2017, demonstrate that SNHU spent \$139 million on promotion and advertising (Inside Higher Ed). SNHU is a private university and is not accountable to their state taxpayers. We simply cannot compete with the exorbitant marketing of an institution accountable to only their investors. To try to do so, based on a presumption of growth, is a significant financial risk.

Purdue-Global (PUG, formerly Kaplan University) has also been frequently cited by NVU administration as an example of best practices and thus, it is important to note that Forbes published an article written by Derek Newton, on 8/31/2019 citing the immense financial losses incurred by PUG – a deficit of at least \$16 million, much loss depicted as due to their marketing/advertising spending but also because of "slowing online enrollment growth overall." It is also important to note that PUG functions separately of Purdue University – separate administrations, marketing, separate courses, instructors, and degree programs, and separate degrees (PUG students do NOT receive a Purdue University degree or transcript). In addition, the state of Indiana has barred PUG from receiving any state tax dollars.

In sum, with a "pooled marketing budget" for our campuses that does not permit us a holistic understanding of costs, 386 NVU OL students (~70% of which are part-time, resulting in a low of ~100 full-time students), with a projected growth of 208% of out-of-state OL students that is not founded on market-based research, significant regional competition in online learning/our marketability, and leadership's persistent emphasis on online schools that seem out of our reach, we conclude that we agree

with Dr. Susan Hunter that there is “concern regarding the ambitious enrollment plan.” We judge this redirection of funds away from support of campus programs to be a very risky financial venture.

Why are we not bench-marking schools that more closely resemble our resource and population? Where are these small state schools that have successfully entered the on-line market while maintaining healthy campuses?

Dr. Linda Olson, President of the VSC Faculty Federation, had the following statement read at the December 2019 Board meeting.

“The VSC Faculty Federation is concerned that the NVU administration is using state appropriations to support NVU Online, an entity that is using out-of-state non-bargaining unit labor and is marketed to out of state students, while at the same time seeking further cuts from campus programs in both scheduled offerings and curriculum for the upcoming year. Since the VT state appropriation for higher ed ranks dead last in the nation, using that money to support a program which does not directly benefit Vermonters as employees, campus students, or the broader communities in which they reside, is deeply troubling.

The Federation would also like to express its deepest concern that at a time when all the campuses are being asked to tighten their belts, full time faculty positions are down over 25% system wide, and staff/maintenance bargaining units are experiencing similar or greater cuts, - the Chancellor’s Office budget went up 41.7% and its staff was increased 21% since 2012. It is unacceptable that the only non-revenue generating office in the VSC appears to have little to no checks on how it chooses to spend its appropriation.”

Please consider the gravity of the situation.

It is clear to many that the disinvestment of higher education in Vermont has now reached a tipping point, pushing our state institutions into the realm of privatization. We clearly need a greater commitment from the state in investing in what is very much a public good. With that said, we fear that more investment under this leadership will only lead to further deficits, increased consolidation, increased outsourcing of local labor, ever-expanding administrative costs, and further disinvestment from the actual campuses resulting in diminished quality, local resources, and opportunity for our students.

A review of each of the administrative proposals put forth this year (VSCS Forward/NVU Strong!) would find that each would clearly increase the role and presence of on-line education within not only NVU but presumably the broader VSC. While how such will be implemented currently remains unclear, we should expect that the administration is incentivized to further reduce campus-based faculty while replacing their course offerings with NVU Online (it is less expensive to have an NVU Online part time faculty teach general education classes to CSU students than CSU full and part-time faculty as well as CCV faculty). This increased reliance on NVU Online and online/telepresence education in general will not fix the problems of enrollment and retention. As the research cited within the above vision statement demonstrates, these policies will only exacerbate the very same problems the VSC/NVU administration are proposing to solve. These policies will further hurt retention rates, result in worse student performance, higher student dropout rates, as well as result in an overall decrease in enrollment.

Administration Proposals Propelling Campus Students into NVU Online/Reducing Campus Offerings

VSCS Forward

- “Charge a combined CU/NVU academic affairs group to develop clear evaluation criteria for review of duplicate and low-enrolled programs and a draft proposal for consolidation, increased investment, and/or closure...consolidation of programs to single majors, and telepresence/hybrid delivery models.” (Slide 11)
- “Develop a single general education program core and make this available in person and online.” (Slide 13)
- “Develop a plan to provide options for students to have flexible access to course offerings from all system institutions across the state. We recommend a structure that allows all students, including students in rural parts of the state, to take courses online or at telepresence locations.” (Slide 13)

NVU Strong!

- “Pursue a new level of collaboration with the Community College of Vermont to deliver courses along degree pathways and to make NVU courses available to CCV students.” (pg. 3)
- “Pursue a new level of collaboration with the Community College of Vermont to deliver courses along degree pathways and to make NVU courses available to CCV students.” (pg. 3)
- “Allow for seamless movement between NVU Online and on-campus learning.” (pg. 3)

Issues with Single Accreditation Model

Our concerns with the proposal to create a single university under one accreditation as purposed by the Labor Task Force and VSCS Forward are with the 1) single accreditation across the system, 2) common general education across the system, and 3) common core for majors across the system. First, we would like to note that our perspectives and positionalities stem from educational and professional backgrounds rooted in policy analysis. We have been trained to examine the evidence at how a policy or proposal will most likely be implemented - that is, what it will look like at the ground level once enacted. Some of the largest discrepancies in policy development occur between design/goal setting (about where we are now with all of the task forces) and implementation. Policies and programs are very rarely implemented as initially designed and as such, we should carefully consider avenues for diversion from the original intent as well as the potential impact. We are concerned with what we believe may be the latent implications of the Labor Task Force proposal based on the evidence and case studies we have nationally and locally. Questions we should be asking: Why have single accreditation systems been pushed for by centralized administrations elsewhere? Why have faculty resisted single accreditation models? What has happened to faculty, students, and the curriculum following a unified general education across a system? How did single accreditation, common general education, and common core for majors function in our own case study at NVU? What has been the experience of NVU faculty and students impacted by single accreditation? Has such a restructuring been proposed by faculty bodies elsewhere? These are just a few questions that provide us with a good place to start in our own critical assessments. We would certainly be remiss if we did not explore why administrations have been so keen to pursue single accreditation models.

Considering our own informal formative evaluation case study of the single accreditation model at NVU, we experienced a significant decrease in faculty, a decrease in our academic affairs budget, a significant decrease in campus-based learning opportunities for our students, massive consolidation of the curriculum across the two campuses, and a heavy push towards a reliance on on-line education and telepresence at the expense of students' needs and demands.

We also witnessed an erosion of true faculty governance and autonomy as campus-based programs at one campus were lifted and provided to another campus, against the explicit consent and recommendations of discipline experts. Other campus-based programs were coerced into the same practice. Under the single accreditation model at NVU, some programs were simply eliminated (Secondary Education, Sociology/Anthropology, and Math/English have been proposed). Under a single accreditation model, one campus can be the preferred campus for central admin or the flow of resources. Under the single accreditation model at NVU, the CRJ program at Johnson was never staffed with a campus-based faculty and was provided to campus-based students wholly via part-time on-line instructors for several years. This practice would not be acceptable had the campuses retained their separate regional accreditations. NVU-Lyndon has been explicitly told that "NVU has a political scientist. NVU has a sociologist." This would not be considered acceptable had we retained our separate regional accreditations. If merged system-wide, we foresee a future in which many campuses are told "The VSU has a historian. The VSU has a geologist." We do not wish to see these detrimental implications of single-accreditation NVU magnified across the entire system.

Those present at Lyndon's September 2019 board meeting and the campus-wide NVU Online meeting that followed would have heard hours of student testimony regarding their rejection of the impacts of a single accreditation model. Students loudly protested the assumption that they could "zoom" their classes

from Johnson, protested at the erasure of portions of their programs due to program consolidation across campus (Mountain Recreation and Outdoor Education), students complained about the transfer of their anthropologist with no plans for a new hire, and students railed against having their degree programs eliminated after their arrival and the provost's decision to simply change their major for them. Most specifically, students loudly cried that following unification, there has been a lack of campus-based courses available for them to complete their general education requirements. Jeb's response - "NVU Online is here to support your general education."

Alternative to single accreditation system:

We would like to propose the consideration of the SUNY, University of Wisconsin (UW), and UNC models. In these states, the state systems have been branded with their state system logo, allowing for the schools to be identified as state schools. Each university or institution within the system retains its own separate administration and regional accreditation, allowing for regional identities and local autonomy.

We have the opportunity to create a truly transformative public higher education system in Vermont. Further consolidation and any attempt to amplify the ramifications of NVU across the entire system will not truly transform our higher education here in VT and will likely lead to fewer faculty, fewer academic programs, heavy reliance on on-line and telepresence, and fewer campus-based learning opportunities for our students at a time when students nationally are balking against on-line and telepresence offerings.

Regarding the national case studies that we have for single accreditation/merge models of state systems, we draw upon Connecticut and Alaska models. We direct you to the below media for further readings regarding the impact of singular accreditation. We highly recommend reading the several links regarding the Connecticut model. From our understanding, this has been an entirely top-down approach, stemming from the hire of a governor's former chief of staff as the system president.

Further Readings Regarding Single Accreditation Model

Connecticut - CSCU

A Crisis in Confidence in the Board of Regents

<https://ctmirror.org/category/ct-viewpoints/a-crisis-in-confidence-in-the-board-of-regents/>

The Crisis of Higher-ed Real Politik

<https://utotherescue.blogspot.com/2019/04/the-crisis-of-higher-ed-realpolitik.html>

Accreditation Years Away but CSCU Presses Forward with College Consolidation

<https://ctmirror.org/2019/03/07/accreditation-years-away-but-cscu-presses-forward-with-college-consolidation/>

NECHE did turn down the proposal, citing the plan as "unrealistic" - for this to pass, it required numerous more administrative positions to be added. At the time of last year's article, the Board was hiring 34 new Associate deans, at \$90k salaries. The cost across the system from 2017-2019 grew \$10 million dollars in preparation for this merge, an increase of nearly 30%.

CSCU Faculty Petition

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X5DjWguOAq3OVcv78YDD0gA6m-yc0ZWM/view>

Please find a faculty petition against the consolidation of CT colleges with insightful explanations of the high cost of consolidations.

Approval for "One-College" years away, but CSCU Presses forward with Consolidation Plan

<https://ctmirror.org/2019/03/07/accreditation-years-away-but-cscu-presses-forward-with-college-consolidation/>

University of Alaska

https://www.chronicle.com/article/on-a-knife-edge?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_1377025&cid=pm&source=ams&sourceId=117228&fbclid=IwAR0NV1NGcblM_uHXMmhybDCIbN3T3CiiRzvqhozgwgxdbRjwzmzUgPYnheB0

Nearly 40 programs and 700 tenure track faculty across the state campuses have already been eliminated in preparation for the merge. "until he [announced his resignation](#), which took effect on July 1, President Jim Johnsen of the U. of Alaska said that cost savings would come largely from reducing the number of faculty, despite the fact that faculty make up only 16 percent of the entire university cost, and we have a high level of administrative bloat ([an analysis](#) by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems showed that we spend 170 percent more on administration than our peers). Bringing our administrative costs in line with other universities would save \$53 million and immediately solve our financial crisis."

Alaska Cuts Reduce More than 40 Programs

<https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/06/08/u-alaska-cuts-reduces-more-40-programs?fbclid=IwAR1tfZsBeSt57XrKWZ-7r0B2D467QvOAjzavkMuTmolvWjzitlrG0f0yEmI>

Chancellor of U Alaska at Anchorage Cathy Sandeen quoted at the board meeting. "Why would you work diligently on cuts that will destroy your own institution? Why wouldn't you work while yelling and screaming-- or quit in flaming protest? Seriously--the one thing that never works is no protest at all, and

going meekly to your doom--in fact, figuring out how to can get to your doom most efficiently." As of August 7th, Alaska system has withdrawn the proposal to merge across the state system.

Streamline general education across a system

CUNY

Fight Against Pathways-CUNY

https://www.aaup.org/article/fight-against-pathways-cuny#.Xy1I_ihKhPY

At CUNY, administration had cited a 40 year problem with transferability of credits across the colleges, with no data to back this up. To alleviate the transferability "crisis", they proposed a unified gen ed model "Pathways" that would substantially restructure curriculum for several departments, particularly English, foreign languages, and sciences (sciences were slated to lose course credit time for labs). Barbara Bowen, President of the faculty union at the time stated, "Pathways and its analogues in other states are a means of rationing higher education." A report from a CUNY professor on student transfer in CUNY found that the influence of the size of gen ed curriculum had minimal impact on the overall number of credits earned and credits not accepted during the transfer process; transfer students outside CUNY and within CUNY earned approximately the same number of credits; institutional transfer caps or residency requirements are the significant contributors to lost credits. In sum, the Pathways initiative would not have an impact on the outcomes it was supposedly designed to address. It further suggests that Pathways' focus on gen ed curriculum to solve problems of transfer credits was "at best misguided and at worst a misrepresentation of the University's intentions." - i.e., the intentions were likely to eliminate faculty across campuses. Faculty did not successfully resist Pathways and it has largely but slowly been implemented. Massive cuts to faculty at CUNY this spring.