



June 17, 2022

Sophie Zdatny
Chancellor
Vermont State Colleges System
PO Box 7
Montpelier, VT 05601

Dear Chancellor Zdatny:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on April 22, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the substantive change proposal submitted by the Vermont State Colleges System regarding its plans to consolidate Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College into Vermont State University and took the following action:

that the substantive change proposal submitted by the Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS) be accepted and the System be advised to proceed with its plans to consolidate Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College into Vermont State University (VSU);

that, contingent upon the Commission's determination that the plans outlined in the proposal to assure VSU meets the *Standards for Accreditation* by July 1, 2023 have been successful implemented, Vermont State University be granted initial accreditation, effective July 1, 2023;

that the request that the Vermont State University president also serve as president for Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College during AY2023 be approved;

that VSCS submit two progress reports between now and July 1, 2023 to document its success in achieving the goals and tasks it has established for the time period covered in each report;

that the first progress report be submitted by September 1, 2022 for consideration at the Commission's September 2022 meeting and the second report be submitted by March 24, 2023 for consideration at the Commission's April 2023 meeting;

that the Fall 2023 comprehensive evaluation of Northern Vermont University be cancelled and replaced with a focused evaluation to assess the initial implementation of the consolidation;

that each progress report and the report prepared for the Fall 2023

focused evaluation include updates on:

- 1) enrollment and budget projections for Vermont State University and progress toward eliminating the System's structural deficit and achieving the anticipated \$25 million in structural savings;
- 2) development of a hybrid operational model for VSU;

that the September 1, 2022 progress report also provide evidence of VSCS' success in achieving the following:

- 1) With respect to Standard One, *Mission and Purposes*:
 - a) VSU policies and programs are being reviewed for alignment with the University's mission and vision;
- 2) With respect to Standard Two, *Planning and Evaluation*:
 - b) high-level financial, facilities, and enrollment plans for VSU have been completed;
 - c) a director of institutional research and strategic planning has been hired;
- 3) With respect to Standard Three, *Organization and Governance*:
 - d) the Vermont State University President has taken office;
 - e) the VSU leadership structure is being implemented;
 - f) the design for the academic organization structure has been completed;
 - g) the design for the administrative leadership structure has been completed;
 - h) common meetings times for Faculty Assembly and Curriculum Committee chairs have been determined, and a "statement of values" has been established;
- 4) With respect to Standard Four, *The Academic Program*:
 - i) the unified curriculum review process is underway;
 - j) the design and faculty review of the General Education Program is underway;
 - k) progress has been made to move specialized accreditations to VSU;
- 5) With respect to Standard Five, *Students*:
 - l) "digital first" and "one stop" approaches to advising, career services, and other student supports are being designed;
 - m) program-specific admissions requirements have been determined;
- 6) With respect to Standard Six: *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:
 - n) a faculty development plan for multi-modality delivery is being implemented;
 - o) a system-wide library staffing model has been established;
 - p) a staffing model for all academic functional areas has been established;
- 7) With respect to Standard Seven: *Institutional Resources*:
 - q) Vermont State University tuition and fees for AY2024 have been set;
 - r) a 10-year Strategic Facilities Plan for VSU has been approved;
 - s) Phase I of the VSU Facilities Divestment has been launched;
 - t) a System Chief Human Resources Officer has been hired;
 - u) VSU's Beta Learning Environment has been launched;
 - v) a System-wide Strategic IT Roadmap has been developed;

- 8) With respect to Standard Eight, *Educational Effectiveness*:
 - w) a portfolio assessment plan for the General Education program has been designed;
 - x) an assessment plan for career readiness and post-graduation outcomes has been designed;
- 9) With respect to Standard Nine: *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*:
 - y) the VSU transition micro-site has been launched;
 - z) a VSCS-wide Diversity Statement has been adopted by the Board of Trustees;

that the March 24, 2023 report provide an update on progress to accomplish any tasks and goals not completed during the prior time period and also provide evidence of VSCS' success in achieving the following:

- 1) With respect to Standard Two, *Planning and Evaluation*:
 - a) a strategic plan with metrics is being developed;
 - b) a data analysis infrastructure is being developed;
- 2) With respect to Standard Three, *Organization and Governance*:
 - c) unified faculty governance structure is under development;
- 3) With respect to Standard Four, *The Academic Program*:
 - d) the unified curriculum review process has been completed;
 - e) the General Education program has been approved;
 - f) unified dual enrollment procedures for AY2024 have been completed;
- 4) With respect to Standard Five, *Students*:
 - g) "digital first" and "one stop" approaches to advising, career services, and other student supports are being developed;
 - h) Colleague software has been "rebuilt" for admissions, financial aid, and registrarial services;
 - i) financial aid packages for AY2024 have been designed;
 - j) a unified student handbook is under development;
 - k) progress is being made to secure authorization from the U.S. Department of Education for VSU to award financial aid;
- 5) With respect to Standard Six, *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:
 - l) an academic advising model is being developed;
 - m) retention, promotion, and tenure processes are being aligned with the VSU mission and values;
- 6) With respect to Standard Seven, *Institutional Resources*:
 - n) the FY2024 system and institutional budgets are under development;
 - o) the Facilities Plan is being implemented, and facilities divestment continues;
- 7) With respect to Standard Eight, *Educational Effectiveness*:
 - p) a Student Success and Retention Plan and associated metrics are being developed;
- 8) With respect to Standard Nine: *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*:

- q) institutional policies for VSU have been developed;
- r) the Vermont State University website is being developed;
- s) a unified academic catalog is being developed;

that the report prepared in advance of the Fall 2023 focused evaluation include an update on progress to accomplish any tasks and goals not completed during prior time periods and also provide evidence of VSCS' success in achieving the following:

- 1) With respect to Standard Two, *Planning and Evaluation*:
 - a) a strategic plan with metrics has been completed;
 - b) a data analysis infrastructure has been implemented;
 - c) data dashboards for each area of the strategic plan are being developed;
- 2) With respect to Standard Three, *Organization and Governance*:
 - d) a unified faculty governance structure has been developed;
 - e) other internal governance structures (e.g., student government, staff councils) are being developed;
- 3) With respect to Standard Four, *The Academic Program*:
 - f) transfer pathways and articulation agreements are being reviewed;
 - g) the Program Evaluation Framework is being implemented;
- 4) With respect to Standard Five, *Students*:
 - h) "digital first" and "one stop" approaches to advising, career services, and other student supports are being implemented;
 - i) authorization from the U.S. Department of Education for VSU to award financial aid has been secured;
 - j) a unified student handbook has been completed;
- 5) With respect to Standard Six, *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:
 - k) an academic advising model is being implemented;
 - l) retention, promotion, and tenure processes have been aligned with VSU's mission and vision;
 - m) a Center for Teaching and Learning is being developed;
- 6) With respect to Standard Seven, *Institutional Resources*:
 - n) the System-wide Library has been launched;
- 7) With respect to Standard Eight, *Educational Effectiveness*:
 - o) a Student Success and Retention Plan and associated metrics have been developed;
 - p) PReCIP reviews for optimized programs have begun;
- 8) With respect to Standard Nine: *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*:
 - q) the VSU website has been launched;
 - r) a unified academic catalog and unified student handbook have been published;

that a comprehensive evaluation of Vermont State University be scheduled for Spring 2027.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The substantive change proposal submitted by the Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS) was accepted and the System advised to proceed with its plans to consolidate Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College into Vermont State University (VSU) because the plans outlined in the proposal are consistent with the *Standards for Accreditation* and demonstrate that, if those plans are successfully implemented, Vermont State University will be in compliance with the standards as of July 1, 2023. Therefore, the decision to grant Vermont State University accreditation effective July 1, 2023 is contingent upon the Commission's determination that the plans outlined in the proposal have been successfully implemented.

The Commission commends VSCS for its participatory, multi-year planning effort that resulted in a decision to consolidate Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College into Vermont State University, an institution that will have five constituent "primary" campuses known as VSU at Castleton, at Johnson, at Lyndon, at Randolph Center, and at Williston. The consolidation is part of a "system-wide transformation effort" intended to enhance the System's fulfillment of its mission and to address "years-long structural challenges," including a substantial structural deficit. We are gratified to learn that the state has "prefunded \$20 million of transformation expenses," and we understand that four Transition Teams and "over twenty" sub-teams have been convened to plan and implement the transformation work over the next five years.

As detailed in the substantive change proposal submitted by the System, significant progress on the consolidation has been achieved to date. Mission and vision statements for VSU were adopted by the Board of Trustees in October 2021 and will guide the development of programs, processes, and strategic priorities for the University. The System is seeking to "leverage efficiencies in the production and analysis of data" and improve student success through the hiring of new staff and participation in the National Student Clearinghouse's Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP). A president who brings experience with institutional consolidation has been hired for Vermont State University and will begin work in July 2022; two senior leaders within the System have been named as VSU's provost and as dean of enrollment. A Labor Task Force, comprising representatives of all of the System's collective bargaining units, has been convened to "make recommendations on the future of the System, including conceptual recommendations for a unified governance structure." We are pleased to learn of the participation of "over 85 faculty" in efforts to develop a "optimized program array" for VSU and of the creation of a General Education Working Group that, to date, has drafted a mission and vision for VSU's "Connections" general education program. We further understand that a Common Course Schedule Block has been adopted and will be implemented beginning in Fall 2022. Admissions and marketing teams from the three institutions are preparing a "marketing and awareness campaign" for VSU, and a price-setting strategy is under development. A new academic organizational structure has been created; a new advising model has been proposed; and "beginning steps" have been taken to reduce "variability in academic functional area staffing." A decision has been made to establish a "single system-wide library," and a library director and assistant director have been hired to lead this effort. The Commission is also pleased to learn of the "significant work" that has been accomplished to "better align facilities with the needs and scale of each campus's operations" to achieve the 25% reduction in space that has been set as a goal. Academic transformation teams have "established specific outcomes, measures, and/or processes" to support educational effectiveness, and the Career Development transformation team is designing a "comprehensive approach" to evaluating career

readiness and post-graduation outcomes.

The substantive change proposal submitted by the Vermont State Colleges System includes a request that, during AY2023, the Vermont State University president also serve as president of the three universities that will be consolidated: Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College. We understand that, during the transitional year, the VSU president will delegate “executive operational responsibilities” at each institution to one-year interim executive directors of operations; it is anticipated that these interim positions will be filled by “existing senior administrators” at each institution. As this temporary structure appears to fulfill the intent of the Commission’s standard on *Organization and Governance* to assure each accredited institution has “a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity” (Statement of the Standard), the proposed leadership arrangement is approved.

Despite the many accomplishments noted above, however, substantial work remains to be done between now and July 1, 2023 to assure Vermont State University will be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* by that date. The substantive change proposal provides extensive details about the tasks to be accomplished and the goals to be achieved. To monitor VSCS’ progress in implementing its plans, the Commission requests two progress reports between now and July 1, 2023. The timing of the submission of the reports is aligned with the “key milestones” and timelines included in the substantive change proposal: the September 2022 report will enable VSCS to provide evidence of its success in accomplishing the goals and tasks it has specified for Spring and Summer 2022; and accomplishments for Fall 2022 and early Spring 2023 will be discussed in the March 2023 report.

In addition, the Commission requests that the Fall 2023 comprehensive evaluation of Northern Vermont University be cancelled and replaced with a focused evaluation to assess the initial implementation of the consolidation. The report prepared in advance of the Fall 2023 evaluation will afford VSCS an opportunity to report on its success in accomplishing the goals and tasks specified for Spring and Summer 2023 as well as the initial launch of Vermont State University.

The Commission requests that the two progress reports and the report prepared for the Fall 2023 focused evaluation include updates on two matters related to our standards on *Students; Institutional Resources; The Academic Program; and Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

The substantive change proposal submitted by VSCS notes that, by September 2022, a “high level strategic enrollment plan” will have been developed to address the enrollment declines that all three institutions have experienced. The multi-year pro-forma budget included in the proposal projects no increase in the “volume” of students but anticipates a change in the “mix” of students as well as changes in enrollment by program. The budget also assumes flat revenue of \$102.7 million through FY2027, with expenses decreasing from \$154.9 million in FY2023 to \$138.8 million in FY2027. The Commission further understands from the proposal that expectations for deficit reduction and structural savings have been “codified in state statute,” specifically that the System’s structural budget deficit will be eliminated at a rate of \$5 million per year for the next five years, and that the System will achieve the expected \$25 million in structural savings through “a combination of expense reductions and modest growth in revenue.” We ask that each of the progress reports and the report prepared for the Fall 2023 focused evaluation include an update on enrollment and budget projections as well as the System’s progress toward

achieving the expectations for deficit reduction and structural savings. In making this request, we seek evidence that, as part of the Vermont State Colleges System, VSU “sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve” (*Students*, Statement of the Standard) and that “its resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future” (*Institutional Resources*, Statement of the Standard). Our standard on *Institutional Resources* provides this additional guidance:

The institution’s multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The institution’s financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (7.14).

The substantive change proposal describes the vision for Vermont State University to become “a single technology-enabled hybrid university that will work for students regardless of their specific location” and outlines the extensive work that will be needed to implement this new hybrid operational model. As noted in the proposal, a multimodal approach to instruction is expected to increase program efficiency by enrolling students from multiple locations in a single course section. The Commission appreciates the System’s candid acknowledgment that the most “challenging aspect” of the transformation to a hybrid university will be the work of the student life teams, as each of the three institutions involved in the consolidation has “relied heavily” on in-person programs and services for students. We look forward to learning, through each of the progress reports and the report prepared for the Fall 2023 focused evaluation, of VSCS’s success in developing a hybrid operational model for VSU, consistent with our standards on *The Academic Program; Students; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*; and *Institutional Resources*:

The institution offers required and elective courses as described in publicly available print and digital formats with sufficient availability to provide students with the opportunity to graduate within the published program length (4.35).

Courses and programs offered for credit off campus, through dual enrollment, through distance or correspondence education, or through continuing education, evening, or weekend divisions are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution. Such activities are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus. Faculty and students receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs. Students have ready access to and support in using appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and assures adequate resources to maintain quality (4.46).

All students, including those enrolled in off-campus courses, distance learning courses, correspondence education courses, and/or competency-based programs have sufficient opportunities to interact with faculty regarding course content and

related academic matters (4.47).

The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees (5.9).

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

The content and methods of instruction meet generally accepted academic and professional standards and expectations, and considerations of educational improvement are informed by a shared understanding of what and how students are learning in their academic program (6.15).

Instructional techniques and delivery systems are compatible with and serve to further the mission and purposes of the institution as well as the learning goals of academic programs and objectives of individual courses. Methods of instruction are appropriate to the students' capabilities and learning needs (6.16).

The institution endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. It encourages experimentation to improve instruction. The effectiveness of instruction is regularly and systematically assessed using valid procedures; the results are used to improve instruction. Faculty and academic staff accept their responsibility to improve instructional effectiveness. Adequate support is provided to accomplish this task (6.17).

The institution's system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives. The quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (6.19).

The institution effectively uses information technology to ensure its efficient ability to plan, administer, and evaluate its program and services (7.26).

The list enumerated on pages 2-4 of this letter specifies the goals and tasks the Vermont State Colleges System has indicated will be accomplished in Spring and Summer 2022. Through the progress report to be submitted by September 1, 2022, the Commission seeks evidence of VSCS' success in implementing this phase of its plan to demonstrate the institution's fulfillment of the expectations articulated in these portions of the *Standards for Accreditation*:

The mission and purposes of the institution are accepted and widely understood by its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, students, and sponsoring entity (if any). They provide direction to the curricula and other activities and form the basis on which expectations for student learning are developed. Specific objectives, reflective of the institution's overall mission and purposes, are developed by the institution's individual units (1.4).

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity (*Organization and Governance*, Statement of the Standard).

The board appoints and periodically reviews the performance of the chief executive officer whose full-time or major responsibility is to the institution (3.10).

The chief executive officer, through an appropriate administrative structure, effectively manages the institution so as to fulfill its purposes and objectives and establishes the means to assess the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer manages and allocates resources in keeping with institutional purposes and objectives and assesses the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer assures that the institution employs faculty and staff sufficient in role, number, and qualifications appropriate to the institution's mission, size, and scope (3.12).

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators, is responsible for the quality of the academic program. The institution's organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and wherever offered. Off-campus, continuing education, distance education, correspondence education, international, evening, and weekend programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution (3.14).

The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.15).

The institution offers collegiate-level programs consisting of a curriculum of studies that leads to a degree in a recognized field of study and requires at least one year to complete (4.1).

Programs leading to degrees or other awards have a coherent design and are characterized by appropriate breadth, depth, continuity, sequential progression, and

synthesis of learning. Coherence is demonstrated through learning goals, structure, and content; policies and procedures for admission, retention, and completion; instructional methods and procedures; and the nature, quality, and extent of student learning and achievement (4.3).

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters (4.6).

The general education program is coherent and substantive. It reflects the institution's mission and values and embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live (4.16)

The institution has an orderly and ethical program of recruitment and admission (5.3).

Standards for admission ensure that student qualifications and expectations are compatible with institutional objectives. Individuals admitted demonstrate through their intellectual and personal qualifications a reasonable potential for success in the programs to which they are admitted (5.4).

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations (5.6).

The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees (5.9).

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

The institution supports teaching and learning through a well-qualified faculty and academic staff (*Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*, Statement of the Standard).

There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes (6.2)

Faculty and academic staff are provided with substantial opportunities for continued professional development throughout their careers (6.6).

Instructional techniques and delivery systems are compatible with and serve to further the mission and purposes of the institution as well as the learning goals of

academic programs and objectives of individual courses. Methods of instruction are appropriate to the students' capabilities and learning needs (6.16).

The institution endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. It encourages experimentation to improve instruction. The effectiveness of instruction is regularly and systematically assessed using valid procedures; the results are used to improve instruction. Faculty and academic staff accept their responsibility to improve instructional effectiveness. Adequate support is provided to accomplish this task (6.17).

The institution employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission (7.1).

The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

The institution provides access to library and information resources, services, facilities, and qualified staff sufficient to support its teaching and learning environments and its research and public service mission as appropriate (7.22).

The institution demonstrates the effectiveness of its policies and procedures in ensuring the reliability of its technology systems, the integrity and security of data, and the privacy of individuals. The institution establishes and applies clear policies and procedures and monitors and responds to illegal or inappropriate uses of its technology systems and resources (7.25).

The institution effectively uses information technology to ensure its efficient ability to plan, administer, and evaluate its program and services (7.26).

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment. The institution ensures that information

about student success is easily accessible on its website (8.6).

The institution uses additional quantitative measures of success, such as further education, civic participation, religious formation, and others, as appropriate to its mission, to understand the success of its recent graduates. Information from students and former students is regularly considered (8.7).

In presenting the institution to students, prospective students, and other members of the public, the institutional website provides information, including information about student success, that is complete, accurate, timely, readily accessible, clear, and sufficient for intended audiences to make informed decisions about the institution (*Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*, Statement of the Standard).

The institution adheres to non-discriminatory policies and practices in recruitment, admissions, employment, evaluation, disciplinary action, and advancement. It fosters an inclusive atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds (9.5).

The list enumerated on pages 2-4 of this letter specifies the goals and tasks the Vermont State Colleges System has indicated will be accomplished in Fall 2022 and early Spring 2023. Through the progress report to be submitted by March 24, 2023, the Commission seeks evidence of VSCS' success in implementing this phase of its plan to demonstrate the institution's fulfillment of the expectations articulated in these portions of the *Standards for Accreditation*:

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution's system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.2).

The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.15).

The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded (*The Academic Program*, Statement of the Standard).

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs (4.6).

The general education program is coherent and substantive. It reflects the institution's mission and values and embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The

requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.16).

The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another (4.17).

The institution ensures that all undergraduate students complete at least the equivalent of 40 semester credits in a bachelor's degree program, or the equivalent of 20 semester credits in an associate's degree program in general education (4.18).

The institution demonstrates its clear and ongoing authority and administrative oversight for the academic elements of all courses for which it awards institutional credit or credentials. ... The institution retains, even with contractual, dual enrollment, or other arrangements, responsibility for the design, content, and delivery of courses for which academic credit or degrees are awarded (4.36).

Courses and programs offered for credit ... through dual enrollment ... are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution. Such activities are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus (4.46).

The institution has an orderly and ethical program of recruitment and admission (5.3).

The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees (5.9).

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

Student financial aid is provided through a well-organized program (5.13).

Personnel, facilities, technology, and funding are adequate to implement the institution's student services policies and procedures (5.17).

The institution has identified, published widely, and implemented an appropriate set of clearly stated ethical standards to guide student services. Policies on student rights and responsibilities, including student conduct and grievance procedures, are clearly stated, well publicized and readily available, and fairly and consistently administered (5.18).

Faculty are demonstrably effective in carrying out their assigned responsibilities. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of

appointments, performance, and retention. The evaluative criteria reflect the mission and purposes of the institution and the importance it attaches to the various responsibilities of, e.g., teaching, advising, assessment, scholarship, creative activities, research, and professional and community service. The institution has equitable and broad-based procedures for such evaluation in which its expectations are stated clearly and weighted appropriately for use in the evaluative process (6.10).

The institution's system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives. The quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (6.19).

The institution ensures the integrity of its finances through prudent financial management and organization, a well-organized budget process ... (7.12).

The institution establishes and implements its budget after appropriate consultation with relevant constituencies in accord with realistic overall planning that provides for the appropriate integration of academic, student service, fiscal, development, information, technology, and physical resource priorities to advance its educational objectives (7.13).

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment. The institution ensures that information about student success is easily accessible on its website (8.6).

Through its policies and practices, the institution endeavors to exemplify the values it articulates in its mission and related statements (*Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*, Statement of the Standard).

The institution provides sufficient information to the public about its processes for admissions, employment, grading, assessment, student discipline, and the consideration of complaints and appeals (9.12).

The information published by the institution on its website is readily accessible and sufficient to allow students and prospective students to make informed decisions about their education. The institution's public website includes the information specified elsewhere in this Standard (9.17-9.25) (9.11).

All forms of print and digital communications officially representing the institution are consistent with catalogue content and accurately portray the conditions and opportunities available at the institution (9.14).

The list enumerated on pages 2-4 of this letter specifies the goals and tasks the Vermont State Colleges System has indicated will be accomplished in Spring and Summer 2023. Through the report prepared in advance of the Fall 2023 focused evaluation, the

Commission seeks evidence of VSCS' success in launching Vermont State University and in implementing this phase of the transition plan to demonstrate fulfillment of the expectations articulated in these portions of the *Standards for Accreditation*:

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, the quality of its academic programs, and the effectiveness of its operational and administrative activities, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its system of evaluation is designed to provide valid information to support institutional improvement. The institution's evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods (2.6).

The institution's organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution's system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.2).

Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.15).

The system of governance makes provisions for consideration of student views and judgments in those matters in which students have a direct and reasonable interest (3.16).

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control (4.6).

In accepting undergraduate transfer credit from other institutions, the institution applies policies and procedures that ensure the credit accepted reflects appropriate levels of academic quality and is applicable to the student's program. The institution's policies for considering the transfer of credit are publicly available to students and prospective students on its website and in other communications. The information includes the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education along with a list of institutions with which it has articulation agreements (4.29).

The institution protects academic quality and integrity in the acceptance of transfer credit and seeks to establish articulation agreements with institutions from which and to which there is a significant pattern of student transfer. Such agreements are made available to those students affected by them (4.30).

The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental

health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees (5.9).

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

Student financial aid is provided through a well-organized program. Awards are based on the equitable application of clear and publicized criteria (5.13).

The institution has identified, published widely, and implemented an appropriate set of clearly stated ethical standards to guide student services. Policies on student rights and responsibilities, including student conduct and grievance procedures, are clearly stated, well publicized and readily available, and fairly and consistently administered (5.18).

The institution supports teaching and learning through a well-qualified faculty and academic staff (*Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*, Statement of the Standard).

Faculty are demonstrably effective in carrying out their assigned responsibilities. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of appointments, performance, and retention. The evaluative criteria reflect the mission and purposes of the institution and the importance it attaches to the various responsibilities of, e.g., teaching, advising, assessment, scholarship, creative activities, research, and professional and community service. The institution has equitable and broad-based procedures for such evaluation in which its expectations are stated clearly and weighted appropriately for use in the evaluative process (6.10).

The institution endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. It encourages experimentation to improve instruction. The effectiveness of instruction is regularly and systematically assessed using valid procedures; the results are used to improve instruction. Faculty and academic staff accept their responsibility to improve instructional effectiveness. Adequate support is provided to accomplish this task (6.17).

The institution's system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives. The quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (6.19).

The institution provides access to library and information resources, services, facilities, and qualified staff sufficient to support its teaching and learning environments and its research and public service mission as appropriate (7.22).

The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates;

licensure passage rates; and employment. The institution ensures that information about student success is easily accessible on its website (8.6).

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the curriculum and learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

The information published by the institution on its website is readily accessible and sufficient to allow students and prospective students to make informed decisions about their education. The institution's public website includes the information specified elsewhere in this Standard (9.17-9.25) (9.11).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2027 is consistent with Commission policy requiring newly accredited institutions to undergo a comprehensive evaluation within five years.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report prepared by the Vermont State Colleges System and welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Lynn Dickinson, Chair of the Vermont State Colleges Board of Trustees; Thomas Mauhs-Pugh, Interim President, Castleton University; Sharron Scott, Chief Financial and Operating Officer; and Yasmine Ziesler, Chief Academic Officer. We appreciate your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of your constituencies. Consistent with Commission policy, we will inform the chair of the governing board of the System of this action by sending a copy of this letter to Lynn Dickinson in a few days. You are free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/sjp

cc: Lynn Dickinson
Thomas Mauhs-Pugh
John Mills
Patricia Moulton

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions