



October 24, 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 September 23, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the progress report submitted by the Vermont State Colleges System and took the following action:

that the progress report submitted by the Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS) be accepted;

that the report requested for submission by March 24, 2023 for consideration at the Commission's April 2023 meeting be confirmed;

that, as indicated in our letter of June 17, 2022, the March 2023 report include:

- (1) enrollment and budget projections for Vermont State University (VTSU) 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 VTSU;
- (3) evidence of VSCS' success in achieving the items specified on pages 3-4 of the June 17, 2022 letter; and
- (4) an update on progress to accomplish any tasks and goals not completed during the prior time period;

that the focused evaluation scheduled for Fall 2023 be confirmed.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The report submitted by the Vermont State Colleges System was accepted because it was responsive to the request made by the Commission in its letter of June 17, 2022.

The Commission commends Vermont State Colleges System on its preparation of a well-written report that clearly documents the progress to date on the consolidation of Castleton University (CU), Northern Vermont University

(NVU), and Vermont Technical College (VTC) into Vermont State University. The “Progress Summary” provided at the start of the report was particularly helpful, and we urge VSCS to follow a similar format and include a similar chart in each of its subsequent reports. The Commission is pleased to learn that Dr. Parwinder Grewal began his tenure as president of Vermont State University on July 1, 2022 and is serving as president of CU, NVU, and VTC during this interim year. We understand the senior leaders of those institutions now have “dual appointments as Executive Directors with responsibilities delegated by President Grewal to address logistical and operations issues specific to each institution.”

The Commission is gratified to learn that, as documented in the report, 15 of the 27 items specified for completion by the time of the report’s submission have been fully accomplished, and substantial progress has been made on the others. We note with particular favor that: VTSU policies and programs are being reviewed for alignment with the University’s mission and vision; a new leadership structure has been designed, and several positions have been filled with either permanent hires, current staff with expanded responsibilities, or interim appointments; an academic organizational structure has been approved; a shared services model has been approved by the Board of Trustees, and the transition of Information Technology to the new model is underway; a common master faculty meeting schedule has been established; initial designs for a new advising model and an “embedded career development program” have been completed; a decision was made to make no changes to “program specific admissions requirements;” a year-long “Face to Face Plus (F2F+) Faculty Development” pilot was launched and will involve testing several “beta environments;” a “high-level” ten-year strategic facilities plan has been approved by the Board of Trustees, and Phase 1 of the facilities divestment plan has been launched; a Chief Diversity Officer and a system Chief Human Resources Officer have been appointed; the VermontState.edu micro-site was launched and is operating in conjunction with the CU, NVU, and VTC websites; and a system-wide diversity statement has been adopted.

The report also provides updates on enrollment, budget, and the development of a hybrid educational model, as requested in the Commission’s letter of June 17, 2022. The Commission is pleased to learn the “favorable news” that, as of the time of the report’s submission, FY2023 enrollments were expected to be “5% better” than the FY2023 budget projections with some locations anticipating enrollment 10% higher than budget. The report notes that the high-level enrollment plan that is “nearly complete” includes several “institutional commitments to support enrollment” as well as proposed strategies to achieve these commitments and key performance indicators to measure success. With respect to budget, the Commission notes with favor that the System received “historic levels of funding” from the Vermont Legislature for FY2023: \$60.4 million in the annual base appropriation and \$14.9 million in one-time bridge funding. The report includes VTSU’s revised pro-forma multi-year budget which “continues to be forecasted conservatively;” the revised budget projects a FY2023 net deficit of \$2.34 million (to be funded “entirely from prior year bridge funding”) and a balanced budget by FY2027. Since VSCS’ structural deficit is comprised “almost wholly” of VTSU deficits, the System likewise anticipates it will achieve a balanced budget by FY2027.

The Commission further notes with favor the progress that has been made to develop a hybrid operational model for Vermont State University that will, “inclusively and equitably,” use three primary modalities: in-person, synchronous remote, and asynchronous remote. Faculty involved in the F2F+ program noted above are piloting a “1:1 device technology approach” that includes supplying students with a “kit” designed to mitigate the cellular-access challenges faced by rural students. In addition to the faculty pilot, the IT Team is exploring options for a “web-based solution” to providing students with access to specialized software, and the Career Services Team and Admissions Team are piloting we-based tools and digital learning modules. We understand that a “final determination” about an overall technology strategy is expected by the end of October, and we look forward to hearing of continued progress with this initiative in the next report.

The Commission confirms the report requested for submission by March 24, 2023 for consideration at the Commission's April 2023 meeting. We remind you that, as indicated in our letter of June 17, 2022, the March 2023 report is to include updates on enrollment, budget, and the development of a hybrid educational model as well as evidence of VSCS' success in achieving the items specified on pages 3-4 of the June 17, 2022 letter. The June 17, 2022 letter also stipulates that the March 2023 report is to provide an update on progress to accomplish the tasks and goals not completed during the prior time period. As indicated in the current report, these include developing high-level plans for financial, facilities, and enrollment; completing open searches, including the search for a director of institutional research; creating a "statement of values" reflecting VTSU's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; continuing the review of academic programs using a common rubric; finalizing the General Education program; transitioning specialized accreditations to VTSU; establishing a staffing model for all academic areas and a System-wide staffing model for its "digital-first" library services; and developing assessment plans for general education, career readiness, and post-graduation outcomes. We are gratified to learn of the progress that has been made toward accomplishing these items and understand that, according to the revised timeline included in VSCS' report, many will be completed by the end of the calendar year or in January 2023 with work on the assessment plans expected to continue into May 2023. We look forward to hearing of the institution's success with these matters in the March 2023 report.

The Commission confirms the focused evaluation scheduled for Fall 2023. We refer you to our letter of June 17, 2022 which specifies matters to be addressed in that report.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by the Vermont State Colleges System and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. 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 Eileen Dickinson in a few days. You are free to release information about the report 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,



Russell Carey

RC/sjp

cc: Eileen Dickinson
Parwinder Grewal

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions