

October 2023  
Progress Report



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Completed	Unified Academic Catalog and Handbook Have Been Published

#### Standard Nine: Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

##### Institutional Policies for VTSU Have Been Developed

Institutional policies for VTSU have been developed and are published as part of the University Handbook and Academic Catalogs as described below.

##### VTSU Website Has Launched

The unified University website, <https://vermontstate.edu/>, has launched and continues to expand with content; transition to a new permanent architecture and design for the site is planned for late fall. The three legacy institutional websites now all include notifications that they are part of VTSU and accredited as such, and provide redirection to VTSU's website.

##### Unified Academic Catalog and Handbook Have Been Published

The unified University Handbook is also now complete and is published directly on the website at <https://vermontstate.edu/student-life-at-vermont-state/vermont-state-university-handbook/>. The unified undergraduate and graduate Academic Catalogs are published directly at <https://catalog.vermontstate.edu/>. The University Handbook and Catalogs are also accessible through links within VTSU's portal for ease of access for students, faculty, and staff.

## 2. Achieving Enrollment and Financial Projections

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## Introduction

On June 15, 2023, following review of a June 1, 2023 progress report<sup>1</sup>, the Commission took action to **grant initial accreditation to Vermont State University effective July 1, 2023** to include general approval to offer degrees from the associate's through the Master's level and to offer programming through distance education and encompass all current instructional locations as well as future instructional locations established within Vermont. The Commission further requested that Vermont State University submit a progress report by October 30, 2023 with emphasis on four items: **1. completing tasks and goals for Fall 2023** including matters specified in the Commission's letter of June 17, 2022<sup>2</sup> that were not yet achieved; **2. achieving enrollment and financial projections**; **3. hiring a longer-term interim president and implementing the faculty governance structure**; and **4. continuing to develop the hybrid operational model**.

This progress report documents the goals and tasks achieved in the transformation to create Vermont State University (VTSU) as requested in the Commission's June 17, 2022 letter and not otherwise documented in previous progress reports submitted September 1, 2022<sup>3</sup> and March 29, 2023<sup>4</sup> by the Vermont State Colleges System.

## Institutional Overview

Vermont State University welcomed and enrolled more than 1,400 new students for its inaugural Fall 2023 semester. Consistent with VTSU's mission and vision to provide access to flexible learning options throughout the state, the inaugural class reflects the diversity of students it is committed to serve: 39% are first-time, first-year students, 51% are transfer and readmitted students, and 10% are Early College and dual enrollment students. Overall, this fall VTSU is serving approximately 4,000 undergraduates and over 550 graduates, with 1,502 students living in one of the university's six residential locations. Of the incoming class, 9% enrolled in an online program, 12.5% chose a program at one of the university's learning sites, and the remaining 78.5% are connected primarily with one of VTSU's five main campuses at Castleton, Johnson, Lyndon, Randolph, and Williston.

On September 22, 2023, the Vermont State Colleges System Board of Trustees (**Board**) appointed Dr. David G. Bergh to serve as the next Interim President, succeeding Interim President Smith. The Board of Trustees will launch a traditional Presidential search for the permanent President of VTSU in late summer/early fall 2024. Since his appointment in April, 2023, Interim President Smith has focused on completion of VTSU's first strategic plan and prioritizing key efforts to ensure financial sustainability by 2027 as per the state's plan for the Vermont State Colleges System as established in Act 74, the Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations Act.<sup>5</sup> Since the formal launch of the University on July 1, 2023, Interim President Smith has led

<sup>1</sup> <https://transformation.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Vermont-State-U-Progress-Report-6-1-23.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://transformation.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-APRIL-VSC-SUB-CHG.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://transformation.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Vermont-State-University-Sub.-Change-First-Progress-Report-9-1-22.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://transformation.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Vermont-State-U-Progress-Report-Final-3-29-23.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See Act 74 at p.177

work on “**Optimization 2.0**,” an initiative to refine the academic program array in order to streamline offerings that provide students with clearer choices and robustly enrolled classes, support long-term fiscal sustainability, improve clarity for admissions and marketing, support the unique identity of the five primary campuses, and ensure the array aligns with state needs. A working group of 22 faculty and staff convened in late July to establish data sets for program evaluation. On October 2, draft recommendations for programs grouped in clusters were made to the legacy institutions’ Faculty Assemblies. Faculty were provided four weeks to consider the proposed changes and to provide feedback. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, President Smith sent his final report on the program array to Faculty Assemblies for their consideration and vote at the upcoming Faculty Assembly meeting on November 7<sup>th</sup>.

Final Optimization 2.0 recommendations include discontinuation of 11 programs impacting 80 students; consolidation of sixteen programs to be strengthened through streamlined offerings beginning in Fall 2025; and changes to the campus location of eleven programs affecting future students only. In conjunction with these program recommendations, VTSU’s administration developed a faculty buyout plan with the goal of supporting 20-33 faculty as an alternative to potential layoffs. Seventeen faculty have requested the buyout plan. One full-time faculty layoff is expected. Once all program decisions are implemented, VTSU’s resulting program array will consist of 78 undergraduate and 17 graduate programs, a breadth and blend of programming more consistent with VTSU’s mission and student populations. The eventual goal for an overall ratio of student to faculty is 18:1, compared to VTSU’s current level of 13:1.

Additional strategic priority projects initiated by Interim President Smith include development of a set of metrics to evaluate athletics programs over the next three years and a review and proposed administration staffing adjustments consistent with VTSU’s hybrid operational model. With Interim President Bergh assuming leadership for VTSU next month, all of these significant efforts will continue, furthering the transformation of the University and its campuses to achieve financial and operational sustainability by the state’s goal of 2027.

## 1. Accomplishing Tasks and Goals for Fall 2023

Overall, VTSU has made significant progress accomplishing all of its unification tasks and goals identified in the original substantive change proposal submitted to NECHE in April, 2022. While moving forward with continuous improvement and future planning across all areas, a few tasks in its original proposal have now been refined and developed as multi-year efforts. As such, these are identified as “in progress” areas of work.

### Standard One: Mission and Purposes

No progress reports have been requested. VTSU is pleased to report additionally that across the University, initiatives are underway to ensure we are meeting the diversity, equity, and inclusion goals set out by our Mission and Vision.<sup>6</sup> One way we are doing this is by sharing the Anti-Racism Pledge and collecting signatures via a partnership with the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice (DEISJ) and student leaders to create meaningful engagement and conversation. In November, a campus climate survey will be launched for students as well as

<sup>6</sup> See <https://vermontstate.edu/about/mission-history-values/diversity-equity-inclusion/>.

staff and faculty. The questions for the survey have been completed, chosen through best practices and in collaboration with DEISJ and the Office of Institutional Research, with additional input provided from student success areas such as multilingual student support. Once the data is collected, it will be used as a benchmark to understand student needs and ways to increase feelings of belonging for student of all modalities.

## Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation

### Data Analysis Infrastructure Has Been Implemented (update from June 2023 report)

The Vermont State Colleges system IT Shared Services' data analysis infrastructure, based on the Informer4 live data reporting tool and stored data snapshots, has now been rebuilt with VTSU's new coding schemata in the Colleague student information system. These resources are now being supplemented with use of PowerBI for end-user data dashboards for exploration and visualization as described below.

### Strategic Plan with Metrics Has Been Completed

Vermont State University's first strategic plan including metrics has been completed and was approved by the Board at its June, 2023 meeting.<sup>7</sup> The plan contains four overarching priorities for the university's development as 1) a statewide and hybrid institution with expanded access, increased affordability, and improved student achievement 2) career-ready, 3) community-engaged as a catalyst for rural advancement, and 4) employee-centric with a culture that positively impacts students. Among the aligned metrics to be monitored for expanded flexible access include the percentage of programs offered in these flexible modalities, the number of students by type enrolled in programs by modality, and academic success rates across all modalities. Metrics to evaluate progress in career readiness include the percentage of degree programs with embedded credentials and applied learning requirements, and the percentage of graduates attaining a credential and completing an applied learning experience. Initiatives and projects aligned with the strategic priorities and objectives identified in the plan are now guiding the work led by VTSU's senior team, including a continued focus on faculty development for teaching in new modalities; implementation of career readiness elements in the Connections General Education program; piloting of cost-sharing structures to ensure critical access to specific degree programs that serve the public good such as respiratory therapy; and developing and delivering opportunities for faculty and staff to grow their personal and professional knowledge of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.

### Data Dashboards Are Being Developed

The first set of data dashboards focusing on enrollment have been developed by VTSU's AVP for Institutional Research and Planning. Internal data dashboards are now in use by senior leadership team members for access to daily data; as a next step, dashboards with census data will be developed for publication on VTSU's website. Over the coming year, additional dashboards will be developed to support program, department, and school views of enrollment. The priority for the 2023-2024 academic year is to develop a comprehensive Student Success dashboard to include retention and graduation data for diverse student cohorts, including First-

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/6-12-2023-BOT-materials-final.pdf> at pp. 50-55.

year students, transfers, and Early College students with filtering options based on various variables, such as gender, BIPOC, Pell recipients, and First-Generation.

### Standard Three: Organization and Governance

#### Unified Faculty Governance Structure Has Been Developed

In late May, a model for a new single, unified Faculty Assembly with unified committees was drafted by a representative group of faculty from the three legacy institutions. Further details on implementation of the new Faculty Assembly model are provided in section 3 below.

Other internal governance structures (student government, staff councils) are being developed. Under Interim President Smith's leadership, a President's Council consisting of 36 members has been established. In addition to the President's senior leadership team, the Council membership represents many functional areas of the University including alumni and development, institutional research, workforce development, human resources, athletics, financial aid, advising, online programs, the Student Government Association, and faculty leadership. The President's Council meets monthly, over zoom, to discuss strategic priorities of the University. The goal of this Council is to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to raise important issues to the leadership and for the leadership to discuss transformation proposals and operational plans with the Council prior to implementation to garner feedback and identify implementation or operational impacts.

Over the past year, student government leaders from the legacy institutions and campuses have been working together to establish consistent practices across the system. Currently, with overall leadership provided by VTSU's Dean of Students students have chosen to continue each individual student government association, which operates for its own campus and affiliated satellite campuses and is overseen by the Assistant Director of Student Activities. Student governments have been sent their academic year budgets and will work with student clubs and organizations to oversee spending at both primary and satellite campuses. Student government also administers its own budget to fund programming and other efforts for students. Other coordinated, VTSU-wide activities by student government include a joint statement released by student government presidents in response to the Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action and LGBTQIA+ rights, and development of coordinated trainings for members. Over the next year, each campus' student government has plans to continue to work collaboratively providing joint training in an effort to maintain system consistency. They also plan to work closely together to address systemwide issues on behalf of all of their peers at the university.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice efforts consistent with VTSU's mission are also now strengthening connections and common goals across campuses among faculty and staff; as one example, faculty and staff from all campuses are participating in Building Antiracist White Educators (BARWE) professional development on inclusive campus culture.



## Standard Four: The Academic Program

### Progress Made to Move Specialized Accreditations to VTSU

Specialized accreditations have been moved to VTSU and the accreditation status of each program is identified on the program's page on the VTSU website, <https://VermontState.edu>.

### Transfer Pathways and Articulation Agreements Are Being Reviewed

Highest-priority transfer pathways from VTSU's sister institution, the Community College of Vermont, have been identified by school deans and are currently being reviewed and revised in consultation with program faculty as needed to incorporate VTSU curriculum updates. To date, pathways to Early Childhood Education and Psychological Science are complete, while those to Business Administration, Inclusive Childhood Education, Accounting, Pre-Nursing, and Applied Business are in the final editing stages. The latter group of pathways are projected to be completed by the Thanksgiving break.

### Program Evaluation Framework Is Being Implemented

The program evaluation framework adopted by the Optimization 2.0 working group builds on an initial program review framework developed with support of an external consultancy, rpk GROUP. The current framework includes enrollment, student-to-faculty ratios, and financial data as well as qualitative factors such as program clusters and campus identities, enrollment growth, and critical workforce needs. Data on all of these elements have been shared with VTSU faculty and staff and are serving as the basis for initial recommendations for changes to the programs VTSU offers in the 2024-2025 academic year.

## Standard Five: Students

### "Digital First" and "One Stop" Approaches to Advising, Career Services, and Other Supports Are Being Implemented

Digital-first, one-stop approaches to student supports are being implemented, beginning with this past summer's launch of the University Portal and recently-created Student Success Resources, the one-stop shop for information, forms, policies, and processes from multiple areas such as: Academic Support, Advising, Athletics, Career Development, Disability Services, Multilingual Student Services, Health and Wellness, International Student Services, Student Activities, Public Safety, Residence Life, Student Finances, Study Away, Title IX, and TRIO. From changing their schedule, to requesting a tutor, to setting up a meeting time with their advisor, these resources enable all students to navigate their path to graduation in a consistent, streamlined, and convenient way. Both tools are intuitive and engaging for students, a significant improvement from legacy processes. During the first five weeks of the semester, over 1,000 students have made over 5,000 visits to the Student Success Resources pages.

In addition to the digital University Portal and one-stop Student Success Resources site, the following digital-first and one-stop approaches are currently being implemented.

#### **Advising with SS&E software, CARES Teams, and Student Success Advising Centers):**

Student Success Advisors are using Student Success & Engagement (SS&E), an online system for management of communications and support of students through automated



alerts, standardized note types, filters, and text messaging and email capabilities. Each main campus has a Student Success CARES Team (SSCT) co-led by the Associate Director of Advising and the Associate Dean of Students which provides early intervention and outreach to students at that campus and students at satellite locations and online. Members of the SSCT use their already-established connections with students and/or their specific areas of expertise to create a plan of action with an appropriate level of support and outreach to the student and, when needed, refer students to resource areas within the University. Students who want the opportunity for in-person interaction have access to advisors in primary campus Student Success Advising Centers which also accommodate students who prefer distance meetings via phone or online conference platforms. A team of Student Financial Support Specialists also offer cross-campus support to VTSU students who have billing and finance questions.

**eRezLife housing and conduct system:** A single Code of Conduct now guides the entire university, and staff across all campuses have been trained together on the University Handbook and associated procedures. All of the campuses now have shared digital templates for communications and are using eRezLife, with 219 incidents recorded in eRezLife thus far. As this is the first semester that the new Code of Conduct and University Handbook have gone into effect, procedures in some areas such as Academic Honesty and medical leave are still transitioning from legacy campus-specific practices. The Dean of Students, Advising, Student Affairs, and Computing staff are currently working together to create clear, easily understandable, digital-first processes for these.

**Live, in-person, and remote-access academic supports:** This fall, Academic Support offered three non-cognitive skills development workshops in the Face to Face Plus modality in-person on three different campuses with a Zoom link for students to also join remotely. The workshops were designed for new students and returning students on probation, for a total of 459 attendees to date, both online and in person. An online tutoring service is available free of charge to all students via a link in every Canvas course site. Students continue to have access to drop-in tutoring and peer tutoring, both in-person and by Zoom, regardless of their primary location. Students eligible for TRIO services across VTSU now have access to an online resource, Student Lingo, a series of 50 online student success workshops with the goal of closing skills gaps and improving retention of first-generation and low-income students, and students with disabilities. To date, 29 students have engaged with the resource with 400 content views; usage is monitored by TRIO program directors, who have identified that thus far the most popular workshop is “Financial Literacy,” followed by “10 Habits for College Success & Beyond,” “Navigating the Financial Aid Process,” and “Adulting 101: The Life Skills Challenge for College Students Intro.” Academic Support staff and Student Success Advisors refer students to lessons they feel will help their students, and follow up with the student about what they learned or why they did not access the lesson.

**Career development tasks and Canvas course modules:** Vermont State University Career Development has identified 10 essential career development tasks which align with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). The first four tasks have been developed as modules for inclusion in Canvas course sites and are designed to deliver content and activities to students in first year courses and the General Education

Connections Seminar One. The modules include short videos, interactive surveys, engagement with resources and tools, reflection, and a knowledge check. This fall, nineteen sections of Connections Seminar One, a total of 287 students, have elected to engage with Career Development programming offered through Canvas.

**Online processes for student employment on campus:** In August, a fully online process for student employees to search, apply, accept, and complete any onboarding tasks for campus and workstudy employment was launched. The new process represents a coordinated effort between Career Services, Financial Aid, Human Resources, and student worker supervisors across all campus locations; to date, there are nearly 700 active student workers throughout the university.

*\*Authorization from the U.S. Department of Education for VTSU to Award Financial Aid Has Been Secured*

In August, finance and financial aid staff completed the final account closeout requirements and other steps needed to merge the legacy institutions into Vermont State University with the U.S. Department of Education, and VTSU now has a Program Participation Agreement authorizing the disbursement of aid.

*Academic Advising Model is Being Implemented*

All new students this fall matriculated in a variety of academic programs according to the new advising model. Digital-first, one-stop advising began this summer with a unified “Vermont State 101” online orientation program, which was completed by over 95% of new incoming students this past summer. Under the new holistic model, students have two advisors, a faculty advisor in their major and a Student Success Advisor (SSA). SSAs, who function as a student’s ‘go-to’ person, worked closely with new students over the summer, helping them to access resources, use technology, and register for classes. At present there are twelve SSA’s with 16 in the draft budget for 2024-2025 so that caseloads will remain appropriate as the model grows with next year’s incoming class.

*Standard Six: Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*

*\*Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) Processes are Being Aligned with the VTSU Mission and Values*

Draft evaluative guidelines related to key elements of VTSU’s mission and values (community engagement, applied learning, infusing microcredentials into degree programs, and creating an accessible and equitable learning experience in and outside of the classroom) have been developed in preparation for consultation with the Faculty Federation (fulltime faculty bargaining unit) and, once formally established, VTSU’s Faculty Assembly evaluation committee. While the new VTSU Faculty Assembly governance model remains to be implemented this fall, the established RPT process, as defined in the fulltime faculty bargaining unit agreement, is beginning university-wide. RPT committees within the legacy institution faculty assemblies have been formed and have scheduled meetings to meet with faculty members in their respective legacy institutions in preparation for beginning the review cycle.

### Center for Teaching & Learning Is Being Developed

The Center for Teaching & Learning Innovation (CTLI) has been established with a Director and Associate Director serving all five campuses and supporting faculty teaching in all modalities. Priorities for this first year are establishing a presence via a CTLI website (<https://ctli.vermontstate.edu/>) with meaningful, regular communication (see <https://ctli.vermontstate.edu/the-vermont-state-educator/>), developing programs that address urgent institutional needs related primarily to transformation, and creating resources for faculty. Resources now include a Canvas course template to create more consistency for students across courses, with additional structure for faculty teaching under the online bargaining unit contract, and continued offerings of a four-week 'Intro to Face-to-Face Plus Teaching' course, which guides faculty to apply a backward design framework to developing a bimodal course and then helps faculty develop individual lesson plans for class sessions with emphases on equity, accessibility, and active learning, with 48 faculty participating in the most recent offering of the course during the month of June. A new project under development is support for faculty adoption of DEI learning outcomes in general education courses.

### Standard Seven: Institutional Resources

#### \*Facilities Plan is Being Implemented, and Facilities Divestment Continues

The next step in the ten-year facilities plan calls for development of a Campus Master plan during 2023-2024. A consultancy has been engaged and a working group formed consisting of members representing all campuses and key constituencies including admissions, facilities, faculty, student success, IT, and administration. The working group is conducting campus visits and reviewing data including demographic information, transportation, broadband coverage, campus enrollment, residential occupancy, and classroom space utilization, with future town halls planned to elicit feedback from the broader community. The master plan will identify master planning opportunities, challenges, and issues across each campus.

#### System-wide Library Has Launched

The system-wide digital-first library launched its website (<https://libraries.vsc.edu/>) in May, 2023, featuring Open Athens authentication, EBSCO Discovery Search, and instructional tools and resources for faculty, and unified reference services including a monitored email address, 1-800 phone line, 24/7 chat service, and reference librarian appointment scheduling. A new interim library director was appointed and reports directly to the Community College of Vermont Academic Dean and VTSU Provost jointly as the system Academic Affairs Council. The Library Director, working with the assistant library director and library staff, has developed a plan to ensure patron access at each VTSU primary campus library site with evening and weekend hours. Progress is being made on the library's "digital first" initiative with an overall 20% reduction in print books and manuscripts in the library catalog to date, an accomplishment aligned with VTSU's continued work on facilities master planning. An initial draft budget for academic year 2025 has been reviewed by the system Academic Affairs Council and recommended to the system Presidents' Council. The draft budget includes measures consistent with initial budget goals to achieve savings that will minimally impact library resources without impacting current staff numbers, for example through identification of resource subscription options better aligned with academic programs. This was accomplished through collaborative work with administration, librarians, and faculty and the further unification of library operations

and patron-driven acquisition policies. Development of a three-year strategic plan for unified library operations will commence with library staff in November.

### Standard Eight: Institutional Effectiveness

#### \*Portfolio Assessment Plan for the General Education Program Designed

As part of the General Education Program approval by faculty last spring, a four-year phased implementation plan was developed for some of the program elements. The implementation plan is published in the [VTSU catalog](#), and for this academic year includes the development and offering of Connections Seminars I and II, and revision of breadth category outcomes to ensure they are assessable. In 2024-2025 the implementation plan calls for the inclusion of DEI outcomes in all breadth categories followed by implementation of the e-Portfolio requirement in 2025-2026. In advance of the e-Portfolio implementation, discovery work has begun to identify a suitable platform. This work will include engaging a small group of faculty and staff to participate in the year-long AAC&U e-Portfolio Institute that runs from February 2024 through February 2025. This should afford a mentored approach for studying e-Portfolio implementation. An overall model for General Education program assessment will be developed this academic year by our Center for Teaching and Learning Innovation staff and faculty. The goal is to begin assessing the General Education program in Fall 2024.

#### \*Assessment Plan for Career Readiness and Post-Graduation Outcomes Designed and Being Developed

The assessment plan with metrics for Career Readiness and Post-Graduation Outcomes has now been designed with support from the AVP for Institutional Research. The initial focus for development of these metrics is via a student survey at time of graduation. An initial survey was administered in May 2023 across all legacy institutions to provide baseline data for VTSU. Items included in the assessment plan are utilization of career development resources, participation in work-related experiences such as internships and other experiential learning, perception of preparation for employment, employment at time of graduation, and employment related to major. A total of 646 responses were collected out of the 1452 surveys distributed to undergraduate and graduate students who completed their degrees in December 2022 and May 2023. Survey data from these respondents is now being analyzed by the Career Development team.

#### Student Success and Retention Plan and Associated Metrics Have Been Developed

Fifteen individual functional areas in Student Success, such as advising, academic support, career services, residence life, public safety, athletics, and others are actively working to identify impactful practices in their area that will further the five Student Success Strategic Priorities for the year ahead. These priorities are to 1) implement team-based, holistic and proactive advising; 2) provide streamlined, accessible systems for transactional advising tasks; 3) increase retention rates in target populations--men, Pell-eligible, and BIPOC students; 4) increase sense of belonging and safety for multiple student groups; and 5) increase understanding of the experiences and perceptions of all members of the community related to DEISJ. Each functional area will identify at least one action item that aligns with a strategic priority, along with corresponding timelines, target populations, assessment metrics, assessment targets, and an assessment timeline. Department leads will be responsible for tracking progress of all action

items and assessing effectiveness. Most of this work is already in the implementation stage, and department leads are working with their teams to draw from previous design documents and team meetings to complete a template. The templates will present the information consistently for all Student Success areas and will be part of the Student Success Strategic Plan which is on target for completion in November.

#### PReCIP Reviews for Optimized Programs Have Begun

Although formal PReCIP (Program Review and Continuous Improvement Process) reviews have not begun, significant efforts focused on review and improvement of VTSU's programs are underway via the current Optimization 2.0 initiative. Based in part on the metrics developed for Optimization 2.0 program evaluation, VTSU's full program assessment framework will be completed by the end of this academic year (2023-2024). This framework will connect to the PReCIP process defined by Board Policy 101; initial implementation is now planned for 2024-2025.

#### Standard Nine: Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

##### Institutional Policies for VTSU Have Been Developed

Institutional policies for VTSU have been developed and are published as part of the University Handbook and Academic Catalogs as described below.

##### VTSU Website Has Launched

The unified University website, <https://vermontstate.edu/>, has launched and continues to expand with content; transition to a new permanent architecture and design for the site is planned for late fall. The three legacy institutional websites now all include notifications that they are part of VTSU and accredited as such, and provide redirection to VTSU's website.

##### Unified Academic Catalog and Handbook Have Been Published

The unified University Handbook is also now complete and is published directly on the website at <https://vermontstate.edu/student-life-at-vermont-state/vermont-state-university-handbook/>. The unified undergraduate and graduate Academic Catalogs are published directly at <https://catalog.vermontstate.edu/>. The University Handbook and Catalogs are also accessible through links within VTSU's portal for ease of access for students, faculty, and staff.

## 2. Achieving Enrollment and Financial Projections

### Enrollment

As detailed below, VTSU's total headcount enrollment for the fall is at 5,076. This is consistent with projected declines in total headcount enrollment; however, the blend of enrollment did not yield projected revenue. In analyzing data on this fall's first incoming class, what VTSU has learned that the majority of the incoming class are Vermonters, consistent with prior years at its legacy institutions, but there was a decrease in out-of-state enrollment. Strategy adjustments being planned now to address this include the hiring of a director of digital marketing and

analytics, unprecedented investment in digital marketing capabilities, and the addition of regional admissions staff to help attract students from new geographic regions.

	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023
<b>Total Headcount Enrollment</b>	<b>6,477</b>	<b>5,728</b>	<b>5,565</b>	<b>5,556</b>	<b>5,076</b>
Full-time	4,495	3,711	3,406	3,243	2,849
Part-time	1,982	2,017	2,159	2,313	2,227
Undergraduate Degree-seeking (certif., 2yr, 4yr)	5,093	4,386	4,117	3,963	3,587
Graduate students	731	764	879	934	981
Non-degree		578	569	659	508
<b>New Student Headcount</b>	<b>1,629</b>	<b>1,129</b>	<b>1,334</b>	<b>1,308</b>	<b>1,027</b>
Vermonters	1085	720	842	791	699
Out-of-State	544	409	492	517	328

Vermont State University comprehensively restructured its tuition and scholarship practices for FY2024 as approved by the VSCS Board of Trustees in September 2022<sup>8</sup> and has met its strategic priority for its first incoming class to align costs and aid with a focus on affordability by setting cost of attendance parameters in line with the student experience and establishing consistent tuition and fee rates across all VTSU locations. In the 2024-2025 tuition structure VTSU does not expect to make significant changes to its current tuition and fees structure, but does anticipate a small inflationary increase to account for increased operations costs. This increase will not cover the full inflationary factor, rather VTSU will use both the tuition and fees inflation in addition to operational efficiencies to cover its inflationary costs.

The admissions team for Vermont State University is in place, the operational foundation is built with significant investments in its SLATE admissions CRM to support enrollment goals, and in the coming year a major area of focus will be transitioning to a more consultative admissions approach that emphasizes connections with prospective students much earlier in the process. The work on Optimization 2.0 is clarifying the strengths and differentiators of Vermont State University in its programs, hybrid course access, unique campus locations, and learning and working community opportunities. Enrollment objectives and strategies include increasing enrollments of non-traditional and adult students through employer partnerships; utilizing direct program marketing to increase graduate student enrollments; increasing transfer student enrollment via clear pathways from the Community College of Vermont, targeting specific traditional populations with differentiated communication and collaborations, and increasing dual enrollment students by bringing more VTSU programs to Vermont high schools and technical centers.

#### Financial Projections

We are currently projecting a loss of approximately \$2M over our board-approved FY24 institutional budget of \$134,215 as a component of the total system budget of \$180.1 million,

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-9-21-Board-of-Trustees-Minutes-APPROVED.pdf>



which is pressured by our enrollment mix, specifically lower numbers of out-of-state students than anticipated in the budget build. As identified in our June progress report, in the event that VTSU is unable to meet revenue targets for FY24, a \$2M System reserve approved by the Board will cover the higher than budgeted loss. VTSU recognizes that we are using one-time funding to close this year's budget and are pursuing the additional structural changes described in this report to ensure we continue to make progress towards eliminating the structural deficit by FY2027.

FY25 budget planning is now commencing, beginning with development of shared services budgets and tuition, fee, and aid strategies. Consistent with System Policy 403 and associated policies and procedures, at least two versions of the annual operating budget will be presented to the Board Finance and Facilities Committee in advance of a recommendation to the full Board by June 30, 2024.

Now that VTSU is launched, with rebuilt and unified budget accounts aligned with its unified organizational structure, the senior leadership team under Interim President Smith is refining financial projections consistent with its strategic priorities. Current budget assumptions for the next three-year period include 3.5% enrollment growth, with a strategic focus on expanding nursing program locations, 3% inflation on operating expenses, 3% tuition rate increases, and continued inflationary increases in base state appropriations. Savings of \$2.9M resulting from Optimization 2.0 and additional corrective actions in President Smith's administrative optimization proposal described in section 4 below are projected to achieve approximately \$12M in expense reductions. The remaining \$3.1M structural deficit as identified in the roll forward below will be addressed through combined operational efficiencies over the next three years, primarily in services, supplies & travel, contract negotiations, and shared services expenses, as well as savings resulting from continued downsizing of physical space. With these efforts, VTSU expects to fully eliminate VTSU's projected structural deficit by 2027. Designated state appropriations specific to one-time system transformation will be used to offset additional expenses related to optimization. Without such actions, VTSU will continue to see a sizable structural deficit.



Vermont State University Budget (unrestricted in \$1,000's)					
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
	Actual	Projection	Roll-Forward w/Corrective Actions		
<b>1. REVENUES</b>	<b>141,581</b>	<b>112,524</b>	<b>120,224</b>	<b>128,398</b>	<b>137,076</b>
Tuition & Fees	81,005	62,096	67,633	73,535	79,827
State Appropriation	32,227	27,549	28,375	29,227	30,103
Room & Board	21,084	18,049	19,214	20,512	21,866
Sales & Services	3,939	2,632	2,711	2,792	2,876
Gifts	1,344	1,055	1,086	1,119	1,152
All Other Revenues	1,981	1,144	1,179	1,214	1,251
<b>2. EXPENSES</b>	<b>160,906</b>	<b>131,956</b>	<b>130,865</b>	<b>134,556</b>	<b>140,236</b>
Salaries and Benefits	77,871	69,168	67,978	71,221	76,149
Services, Supplies, & Travel	25,892	26,221	25,508	25,362	25,212
Scholarships & Aid	19,547	9,413	10,252	11,147	12,101
Utilities	6,814	8,221	8,467	8,721	8,983
Other Expenses	-	-	-	-	-
Debt Service & Capital Support	6,304	6,304	6,360	6,114	6,109
Shared Services	11,658	11,658	11,299	10,960	10,621
Chancellor's Office	-	-	-	-	-
Other Transfers	12,820	971	1,001	1,031	1,061
<b>NET REVENUE/(DEFICIT)</b>	<b>(19,325)</b>	<b>(19,432)</b>	<b>(10,641)</b>	<b>(6,158)</b>	<b>(3,160)</b>

### 3. Hiring a Longer-Term Interim President and Implementing the Faculty Governance Structure

The longer-term interim president, Dr. David Bergh, has been hired. Dr. Bergh's term will commence November 15, 2023 and continue through June 30, 2025. Dr. Bergh is familiar to many at VTSU as he served as Dean of Student Life and College Relations, among other student affairs roles on the Johnson campus. At Johnson, he led the cross-institution Student Affairs Council, was widely recognized for advancing the college's diversity and inclusion efforts, and establishing coordinated services for military-connected students. Most recently, he held leadership roles for eight years, including the Presidency at Cazenovia College, a former independent college in New York state.

Current Interim President Mike Smith's term concludes on October 31, 2023. Accordingly, on October 24, 2023, the Board held a special meeting and appointed Provost Nolan Atkins to serve as the acting President between November 1-14, 2023.<sup>9</sup> To support the active work on Optimization 2.0 underway, Provost Atkins, in his role as Acting President, is scheduled to formally consult with the joint Faculty Assemblies on November 7<sup>th</sup> regarding the final decisions on the program array communicated to Faculty Assemblies on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023. The Faculty Assemblies are then scheduled to vote on the proposed changes to the academic programs, at

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023-012-Appointment-of-Provost-Atkins-as-Acting-President-of-VTSU.pdf>

which point Provost Nolan, in his capacity as the Acting President, will have final determining authority on the program array.

A model for a new single, unified Faculty Assembly with unified committees was finalized last May by a representative group of faculty from the three legacy institutions. While the model has been fully supported in a provisional, informal voting after the end of the last academic year, a formal vote to approve and then begin implementation of the model was anticipated to occur at the start of the Fall semester. Since that time, with competing concerns and demands on faculty attention including the Optimization 2.0 initiative and negotiations of the full-time faculty bargaining unit agreement, Faculty Assembly leaders from the legacy institutions postponed the formal vote of approval of the new governance model until after the bargaining unit negotiations have come to a successful conclusion, and they have as of October 31, 2023. A vote on the new bargaining unit agreement has been scheduled to open on November 2, 2023 and will remain open for seven days. Once the contract is ratified after the anticipated Board of Trustees approval at their November 13<sup>th</sup> meeting, Faculty Assembly leaders will bring the new governance model for a formal vote. Despite this delay in implementation, effective coordination across the legacy institution faculty assemblies via their respective leaders continues, with monthly joint meetings of the assemblies and weekly meetings of the assembly leaders. Transitional strategies for time-sensitive work such as the RPT review process have been implemented as described in the update on Standard Six above, and in the case of academic department leadership, unified VTSU academic department chairs have been elected and are meeting regularly as a group together and with their respective new academic deans and the provost.

#### 4. Continuing Development of a Hybrid Operational Model

Vermont State University is using a data-driven, continuous improvement approach to continuing development of the hybrid operational model across the university's operations. This year's priorities include expanding capacity for F2F+ delivery and evaluating associated technology strategies, optimizing academic programs while enhancing distinctive campus identities and ensuring efficient and effective university-wide administration, and increasing student success rates.

**Face to Face Plus (F2F+) delivery expansion:** To date, two cohorts of faculty, for a total of 59 full-time and 14 part-time faculty, in an initial pilot group of 25 during 2022-2023 and a second cohort of 48 in June 2023, have participated in an in-depth professional development program focused on the bimodal F2F+ modality (instruction to students in-person plus live remote access via Zoom). This fall, 39 of these newly-trained faculty and an additional 45 faculty are now teaching in the F2F+ modality in Fall 2023, all of whom were provided with an iPad tablet, a tool that can allow for digital whiteboarding or serve as an additional camera and/or microphone. On September 12-13, the Center for Teaching & Learning Innovation (CTLI) offered technology training sessions focused on the iPad as a teaching tool. In addition to sessions facilitated by technologists, three sessions were taught by F2F+ Mentors, focusing on technology for active learning (including social annotation, interactive slides, and collaborative documents). Continuing training and provision of additional resources remains a top priority for the CTLI in the coming year.

**1:1 Technology Strategy:** There is enthusiastic support from both faculty and students that a reliable personal computing device is essential for college, and particularly with VTSU's many course modalities with an online component such as F2F+. Choosing a baseline device for all to use as a "1:1 technology" strategy is more complicated. In Fall 2022 and Spring 2023, five F2F+ courses each semester piloted student iPad kits (iPads, keyboards, Apple Pencils), which are more affordable than laptops. Faculty reported the 1:1 kits worked really well as the "hub" for interaction between in-person and remote students during synchronous sessions. Through surveys and focus groups, students also identified limitations of iPads for completing homework that required research, multiple software programs, or lengthy writing. This fall, a 1:1 Device Implementation Committee, with representation from staff, faculty, and a student, is supporting the expansion the 1:1 technology pilot to 10 classes and is asking even more targeted questions in student surveys to support a data-informed decision about what device will best serve the majority of VTSU students, considering function and affordability. The committee is also identifying any exceptions needed in high-tech programs where a more robust device might be needed. For students to adopt 1:1 devices for Fall 2024, VTSU's senior leadership team will need to make a final determination late this calendar year about the baseline device (or device options) along with fee structures, financing, and marketing to ensure smooth rollout and fiscal impact for incoming students.

**"Optimization 2.0" and refinements to campus distinctions:** The programming decisions resulting from the Optimization 2.0 process, development of metrics for athletics programs, and related "administration optimization" initiatives are consistent with the continued development VTSU's hybrid operational model needs for digital-first, flexible program access as well as ensuring robust and distinctive campus experiences. For example, the Optimization 2.0 recommendation to consolidate communications at the Lyndon campus further strengthens its focus and quality facilities in broadcast, digital media and synergies with atmospheric sciences, music business and industry, and graphic design. Consolidation of performing arts at the Castleton campus connects with its strong co-curricular programming and local community relationships, and the consolidation of fine arts on the Johnson campus aligns with its robust facilities, MFA program, and local relationship with the Vermont Studio Center. At the same time, high-enrollment programs needed statewide such as those in the Health and Exercise Sciences cluster are recommended for continued curricular streamlining and use of distance delivery modalities where appropriate to improve efficiencies, as well as continued attention to alignment with campus athletics programming to ensure robust student experiences.

Understandably, since the Optimization 2.0 recommendations were made on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, there have been public expressions of concern within the VTSU community as well as constructive feedback and planning. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, the Education, Personnel, and Student Life Committee of the Board of Trustees received an update from President Smith on both academic and administrative optimization and took four comments from the public. Faculty and student feedback has been collected by the school deans to inform the final program decisions announced by President Smith on October 31<sup>st</sup>. Adjustments in ten programmatic areas have been made based on the student, faculty, and dean feedback. The report will be presented to faculty for a vote at their November 7, 2023 Faculty Assembly meeting. Also to date, 17 faculty

have accepted the buy-out option, resulting in only one layoff notice being issued to align full-time faculty staffing with program needs and target student:faculty ratios.

**Athletics:** Programs are now also being tracked for a three-year period on an established set of metrics, including the percentage of student-athletes in campus housing, target growth populations including BIPOC and international students, roster sizes, and program costs. Several immediate specific program changes have been implemented due to low participation and associated high costs with low involvement, specifically the men's and women's Nordic Ski teams at Castleton and the women's triathlon team at Johnson, which have experienced several years without full teams. At the same time, participation in other programs, specifically women's volleyball at Castleton and men's lacrosse at Lyndon has increased with some changes in coaching positions and implementation of the athletic recruit portal in the Slate admissions software to support recruitment.

**Administration optimization:** Optimization of VTSU's administrative operations over time is a multifaceted effort to achieve appropriate administrative staffing levels in alignment with all aspects of VTSU's operations, which also include system shared services, employee supports and benefits, and campus facilities master planning. Specific to administration staffing, on October 27<sup>th</sup> Interim President Smith released a report<sup>10</sup> with recommended reductions that follow strategic design principles to achieve an administration that is right-sized comparable to peers in students per staff FTE (VTSU's current level is 11 compared to peers at 14) and well-organized to support a unified, rural public university with multiple campuses and learning centers. The report identifies specific non-faculty personnel reductions to achieve approximately \$3.1M in savings, for a reduction of 33 full-time positions with 21 at the executive, management, or supervisory level. The report further recommends achieving savings in system shared services, health care, and restructuring of retirement benefits to achieve a better alignment of total compensation with comparable organizations. VTSU leaders will continue to work through these recommendations in the coming year in conjunction with FY2025 budget planning and future financial projections.

**Increasing student success:** This fall's inaugural class's experiences reflect VTSU's current hybrid operational approach to student success, with over 95% of students completing Vermont State 101, VTSU's online orientation program, and 163 students opting to participate in one of the eight Vermont State Summer Days offered throughout the state. Vermont State Kick-off Weekend welcomed residential and commuter students at the five main campuses and included an array of social and interactive programming to introduce students to the campus and to one another. Newly created "digital-first" resources such as the Student Success Portal described above in progress updates on Standard Five have provided a strong foundation for the hybrid approach. VTSU's Student Success Team, which is comprised of over 125 staff university-wide, is planning a retreat in January to assess its effectiveness in its hybrid operations overall and by functional area according to metrics aligned with its first two strategic priorities: 1. implementing a team-based holistic model ensuring proactive advising based on needs and 2. providing streamlined, accessible systems and information for transactional aspects of advising.

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<sup>10</sup> See [https://transformation.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Administrative-Optimization\\_102623\\_832pmFinal-Version.pdf](https://transformation.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Administrative-Optimization_102623_832pmFinal-Version.pdf)

