


**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Legislative Select Committee on the Future of the Vermont State Colleges System.

FROM: Patricia Moulton, President; Vermont Technical College 

DATE: 11/12/2020

SUBJECT: Transformation Planning at Vermont Technical College

CC: Joyce Judy, Chair; Sophie Zdatny, Chancellor, VSCS

Thank you all for your work deliberating on the best path forward for assuring a strong and sustainable future for the Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS).

I want to share two critical transformation planning projects underway to assure a sustainable and competitive future for Vermont Tech. The work of this Select Committee as well as the work of the VSCS *Forward* group are focused at the system level. The work of these two processes focuses on Vermont Tech. It is important for this Committee to know this work is happening and should align with this Select Committees work. Planning continues and implementation has begun. An internal group is analyzing transformation of the college and a mostly external group is developing a plan for our agriculture and food systems programming including our farm in Randolph Center.

I am happy to provide additional information such as the project charters of the TAT work and/or the outcomes of the Ag & Food Systems planning. If the committee needs additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Transformation Advisory Taskforce (TAT)**

After former Chancellor Jeb Spaulding announced the planned closure of the Randolph Center campus of Vermont Tech and the Board's subsequent withdrawal of that proposal, it became clear we at Vermont Tech needed to plan for our long term sustainability. We developed a plan as part of the "Securing the Future" work of the VSC and our own strategic plan update. COVID stepped up the urgency of implementation.

The notion the VSCS might close the only technical college in the state seemed then, and now, to be short sighted. Particularly considering Vermont Tech achieves the best return on investment of *any* college or university in Vermont as measured by [Georgetown University's Center on Education and Workforce Development](#) first ever report on higher education ROI. Vermont Tech also consistently achieves a 98-100% placement of graduates within six months of Commencement. And a college that provides education in a large chunk of the [most promising careers](#) in Vermont as defined by the McClure Foundation. Why? I believe this was driven by the former Chancellor's assumption the VSCS is "over built" for the current demographics as well as his understanding of the significant deferred maintenance at the Randolph Center campus. As a result, we moved forward with transformation planning.

As President, I formed the Transformation Advisory Taskforce (TAT) in May of 2020. The TAT is comprised of 15 members representing students, faculty and staff and all of the collective bargaining units. The charge was to assist in the development of a plan to transition the college - VTC specifically, not the VSC - to a highly sustainable and stable institution and be a community of colleagues that represented our broad community, providing a framework and filter to support an inclusive gathering of ideas and priorities.

The group received over 400 ideas, comments and suggestions on how to transform the college from employees, students, alumni, interested parties, members of the great Randolph Community and the Vermont Legislature. The TAT developed “guardrails” for all ideas submitted and helped rank and organize them into themes. Within these themes we developed four major “buckets” of transformation priorities. Within each of these buckets, we have developed projects to move transformation forward. Prioritizing a project management approach to this work, we have developed Project Charters for each of the projects listed below. These charters identify clear goals, deliverables, timelines, stakeholders, budget, teams and measures.

A “drafting team” was formed comprised of members of the TAT who are also members of the Presidents Executive Committee of Vermont Tech, to develop a draft plan. Members of the Drafting Committee include myself; Littleton Tyler, Dean of Administration; Ana Gaillat, Dean of Academic Affairs; Jason Enser, Dean of Students and Kellie Campbell, Chief Technology officer. This team will be driving the plan forward along with other members of the college community who will serve on work teams for each project.

The buckets and projects are:

- I. Consolidate programs, add certificates, minors, pathways and other credentials.**
  - Project: Conduct comprehensive reviews of academic programs to develop a robust and sustainable academic review process to assure quality, relevance and teaching to the latest technologies and state workforce needs in all academic programs.
- II. Improve access: develop additional/alternatives delivery methods.**
  - Project: Explore, implement and prioritize new non-traditional delivery learning modalities and student services. Supplement and expand current offerings to serve new populations (working adults, career changers and more) to provide better access and develop new pathways.
  - Project: Enhance enrollment pathways with other VSCS institutions, Career and Technical Education Centers and high schools to increase students pursuing education as well as pursue possible decentralized delivery.
- III. Reduce physical footprint, consolidate usage and sell/lease unused assets.**
  - Project: Transformation and investment in physical infrastructure, specifically consolidation, selling, leasing or otherwise disposing of facilities not core to the mission. Prioritize investment in remaining core infrastructure to address deferred maintenance and new technologies.
- IV. Assess performance in all resource areas and functions, academic and non-academic.**
  - Project: In depth fiscal analysis of all operational functions to better understand expenses associated with each function AND conduct a comprehensive review of

different pricing models. These analyses will better inform how our expense and revenue structure impacts students and tuition, how certain programs subsidize other programs and better understand the financial and non-tangible implications of programs and departments.

Work has begun on bucket III above. We have begun consolidating offices. We have listed certain properties for sale. We are proceeding with others properties the Board of Trustees has approved for sale or lease. Our next steps are setting up teams to begin work on the other projects. Program review will begin in early 2021. We expect we will be ready to launch some alternative delivery courses in the fall of 2021. Work will progress on additional charters as those teams come together. We recognize the urgent need to transform and we are on our way.

### **Agriculture & Food System Education Transformation Project**

After the former Chancellor's announcement to close the Randolph Center campus, deep concern emerged for the future of Vermont Tech's agriculture program. The proposed move to Williston could have meant elimination of the states only applied agriculture program relied upon by dairy farms in Vermont for several decades. Recognizing the unique aspect of the ag and food systems programs at Vermont Tech, as well as the need to invest in those facilities and resources, we created the "Ag & Food Systems Transformation Project.

I have seated and empowered a 13 member Steering Committee to conduct a re-visioning and transformation process and to develop a roadmap for creating a world class agriculture and food system program at the Randolph campus focused on a wide range of production practices, product categories and farm/food entrepreneurship, which still includes a strong program to support Vermont's evolving dairy industry. The re-visioning process is focusing on developing an experiential education niche that Vermont Tech can "own" – meaning, no other school in the US can offer the kind of hands-on, cutting edge learning environment and educational offering that Vermont Tech can.

We have successfully recruited **62** highly dedicated and passionate volunteer stakeholders and subject matter experts from around the state and from Vermont Tech to be part of this process. This includes **43** who are serving on the various Teams and working committees. All agriculture and food systems employees at Vermont Tech are deeply engaged in this work. The work of this Ag & Food Transformation Project fits nicely with the TAT process by focusing on agriculture programs and resources.

The process has a 13 person steering committee made up of the volunteer co-chairs, 4 teams with team leads and additional key stakeholders who are leading the overall process over a 9 month period. We have held open forums with small and large groups of stakeholders, alumni, community members, faculty, students, businesses and farmers to obtain input and provide progress reports.

The four teams are focused on the following areas:

- **Program Model Development Team** – This team has explored what other colleges/universities are doing in the ag and food educational space, identified gaps and/or confirmed current configuration, explored a mix of 2 and 4 year degrees, internships, apprenticeships, certificates and stackable credentials which could be provided. This team also examined distance learning vs. residential opportunities and researched best practices/models of similar schools and farms to help with the analysis regarding Vermont Tech’s farm. This team has made a recommendation to the Steering Committee.
- **Culture & Curriculum Team** – This team has explored what type of culture to develop/promote within the school and student body, what is the curriculum for different ‘tracks’ of study and what VT’s dairy community still needs Vermont Tech to provide including the needs of the next generation of dairy farmers in Vermont. They considered the desired background of professors, advisors, and program coordinators needs, where learning could take place (mix of off campus and on campus) and examined the Vermont Tech farm. They too have made recommendations to the Steering Committee.
- **Business Case Team** – Now that the Program Models and Culture & Curriculum Team have completed their work, this Team will begin its work to explore and create a business model that can accommodate the desired re-vamped ag-food program and be financially sustainable within 3 years. They will also explore what the cap ex needs up front (based on building out the new model) will be, as well as a schedule for long-term investment in the facilities and assets of the program. They will determine how many students would be needed, staffing costs, and variable costs to make this revamped program viable.
- **Communications & Outreach Team** – This Team is also getting underway and will explore what is the Vermont Tech brand for ag and food systems? They will fine tune the vision statement and value proposition for the new Ag-Food program at Vermont Tech including finalizing new names for the program. The Team will also develop the language to talk about this new program and figure out a national marketing and outreach process to attract students from away as well as internal communication to attract Vermont students.

We will present the details of this plan when the Business Case and Communications teams have completed their work. If the Business Case team finds certain elements are not feasible we will pivot to find alternatives. We are not sharing publicly until we know we have a workable plan. Current recommendations present exciting opportunities for Vermont Tech if they prove feasible. If this committee would like more details I am happy to provide.