

NVU Legislative Update
7/30/20

I am writing to update you on the Vermont State College System's (VSCS) continued need for bridge funding and sustained, meaningful state financial support as well as on our plans here at Northern Vermont University (NVU) to welcome students back for in person instruction this fall.

The Vermont Legislature recently commissioned a financial assessment of the VSCS, including the expected financing gap and the timing of funds needed in the 2020-2021 academic year. The report recommends that the legislature appropriate \$40.3 million^[i] in bridge funding for the VSCS in addition to the regular appropriation and the CRF funds. To date, the legislature has appropriated \$5 million in bridge funding. This falls far short of what is necessary to have a functioning, successful VSCS that supports Vermont students—often those in most need of the opportunity of an affordable, high-quality, in-state college education-- and creates a thriving workforce for our employers. In the upcoming August/September session, please support \$40.3m in bridge funding to ensure that the VSCS can continue to serve Vermont students and Vermont employers for generations to come.

The health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, and our communities is our number one priority and we are taking every precaution to ensure the safe opening of our campuses. We at NVU are closely following guidance and updates from the CDC, the Vermont Department of Health, and the governor and are implementing safety protocols, which include starting our academic calendar earlier and ending earlier, greatly enhanced cleaning protocols, enforcing masks universally throughout campus, and designing curriculum to allow for social distancing.

NVU faculty and students admirably rose to the challenge of remote learning when we shut down our campuses in the spring. It was truly humbling to see the NVU community rally in the face of so much adversity. It was also apparent that in many areas online learning cannot be a long-term substitute for in person instruction. Many of our courses are structured around hands-on learning that is difficult to replicate remotely. Additionally, as has been seen around the country, distance learning can exacerbate the inequities already entrenched in our society with some students struggling to get access to the internet and not having home environments conducive to online learning.

This is why we are planning to resume in-person instruction August 18 so long as it remains safe.

We will continue to closely monitor the spread of the virus and if it becomes unsafe to be open, we have plans in place to resume remote learning. For faculty who have health concerns and would like to continue to teach remotely we are urging them to make a request to do so. Additional information regarding a safe return to NVU is available on our [website](#).

As NVU and our sister institutions work to navigate through the pandemic, our focus is on ensuring access to affordable higher education. The vast majority (70%) of NVU's students are Vermonters and nearly half of them are first in family to attend college. The university remains committed to providing an innovative professional and liberal arts education that prepares students to be critical thinkers and engaged global citizens. In addition, NVU's economic impact of \$113 million makes it vital to the economic, educational, environmental, and cultural vitality of Northern Vermont.

We want to keep you up to speed on the operations at NVU throughout the fall and beyond and will be providing updates whenever new information is available. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at 802-635-1251 or Leah.Hollenberger@NorthernVermont.edu for more information.

Thank you and be safe!

Leah

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^[1] \$40.3m is the amount recommended by education consultant and former University of Maine Chancellor Jim Page in his [report](#) commissioned by the Joint Fiscal Office. On page 3 of the report, he recommends "\$30m in addition to regular appropriation and COVID Relief Funds plus an additional \$10.3 million due to having to suspend in-person instruction and residential services." A [FY2021 financial forecast](#) presented during the July 23, 2020 VSCS Finance and Facilities Committee stated that the VSCS currently projects a deficit of \$30m and that it is likely to be closer to the worst case scenario, possibly a \$46m or more deficit in FY21.