

Postsecondary Education

2009

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What can you do to make a difference in Vermont? What can we do together? The Vermont Community Foundation is dedicated to helping philanthropists **learn** about community needs, **lead** through investment in innovation and proven successes, and **grow** philanthropy by increasing its effectiveness and inspiring others to give.

The Foundation periodically produces in-depth reports such as this one, on issues where there is significant community interest and momentum. This report explores the issue of access to *Postsecondary Education* in Vermont.

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WHY

Postsecondary Education

A commitment to improving lives through education has been a signature of Vermonters since early in our nation's history. In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law the Land Grant Colleges Act introduced by U.S. Congressman Justin Smith Morrill of Vermont, resulting in a national system of industrial and agricultural colleges that opened doors to education—and a better way of life—to millions of Americans. At the beginning of the 21st century, we once again have the opportunity to take a leadership role in ensuring that all may reap the benefits of quality education.

While the Vermonters of today continue to prioritize education, higher education in particular is challenged. Among other factors, access to college is limited by structural and institutional barriers, as well as by stretched family budgets and low aspirations. Links among colleges, vocational training centers, and high schools are weak, hindering preparation and deterring student enrollment. Postsecondary institutions compete for waning state and federal dollars.

Meanwhile, advancements in almost every arena call for new levels of preparation for work, citizenship, and life. In Vermont, the need for graduates with degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics is accelerating. Our fastest growing occupations require some level of training or education in the years after high school. College graduates earn more over their lifetimes, are generally healthier, and are more involved in their communities than those without postsecondary experience. They contribute more to federal, state, and local taxes, and also tend to require less from state support systems, such as unemployment benefits, welfare, corrections, and health care. The benefits also extend to workers with lower levels of education, who earn more when others within their community attain higher levels of education. Postsecondary education continues to bear fruit by contributing to the health, well-being, and opportunities available to successive generations. In short, it is clear that higher education provides a collective public benefit in addition to a private, individual benefit.

Congressman Morrill's contributions to postsecondary education endowed our state and nation with personal, social, and economic power. Through careful consideration of what is at stake and what we can do to help, we can ensure this legacy continues.

the FACTS

Benefits Are Big

- College graduates are more likely to have healthy families, have children that perform well in school, vote, volunteer, serve on civic boards, and patronize the arts.
- Research suggests that college graduates are also more likely to engage in entrepreneurial endeavors—starting businesses and creating employment opportunities for others.
- College graduates earn nearly double that of high school graduates over the course of a lifetime—\$2.1 million compared to \$1.2 million.

Demand Is Great

- Nationally and locally, job growth depends upon increases in skills. More jobs are requiring increased levels of schooling as economies shift from manufacturing to knowledge-based enterprises. Between 2004 and 2014, an estimated 54 million jobs will open nationwide. Of these, 14 million will require a minimum of a four-year college degree, and an additional 15 million will require some amount of education beyond high school.
- Postsecondary education is becoming a must-have for many careers in Vermont. Of the 25 fastest growing occupations, 19 require some level of postsecondary education or training.



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THE REALITIES OF
Cost & Debt

The financial burden of higher education is heavy and growing, especially given recent events in the world's economies. Colleges and universities raise tuition in an effort to counteract shrinking government funding and disproportionate growth in the cost of the goods and services they use most, e.g., energy, salaries, and health insurance for faculty and staff. Scholarships and grants have failed to keep pace with rising student costs. Understandably, many Vermont families hesitate to take on large loans needed to cover college.



the **FACTS**

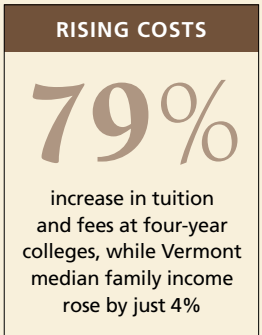
Government Support Lags

- Low levels of state and local funding in Vermont mean that more of an institution's costs are covered by tuition, placing a greater burden on students and their families. In Vermont, contributions from the state and local municipalities made up just 14.4% of all revenues received by postsecondary institutions in 2006, compared to the national average of 39.9%. Vermont's level of contributions to overall revenue was the lowest of all states and the District of Columbia. 
- Vermont has the fourth-lowest state appropriation for higher education per \$1,000 in personal income; state appropriation for higher education per capita puts Vermont second to last in the nation. 
- While federal Pell grants given to low- and middle-income students covered 80% of college costs in the 1970s, today these grants cover just 40% of college costs.

Costs Rise


- Nationally, college costs are compounded by the rising prices of other goods and services essential to running these institutions. Between the 2001–2002 and the 2006–2007 school years, tuition and fees jumped 35% for in-state students at public, four-year colleges, the largest tuition increase during any five-year period of the past 30 years.

- Family income in Vermont is not keeping pace with the rising costs of higher education. While the median family income in Vermont rose 4% between 1999 and 2007, tuition and fees at four-year colleges across the country rose 79% during the same period.
- In-state tuition and fees at the University of Vermont, the state's only four-year public university, are some of the highest in the nation for comparable institutions.



Debt Expands

- Vermont students and their families incur 25% more debt for a bachelor's degree than the national average, ranking Vermont second to last in the nation for affordable education.
- Student debt in Vermont continues to grow. The average student debt in Vermont jumped from \$19,660 to \$23,839 between 2005 and 2006, a 21% increase that ranks as the third-highest average student debt load in the nation.

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PROMISING APPROACHES

Increasing aid to Vermont students

The **Vermont Student Assistance Corporation** (VSAC) provides information and financial resources for Vermont students to pursue postsecondary education, within or outside the state. One of the only state financing agencies for students in the country, VSAC is a public nonprofit that provides grants, loans, scholarships, and career and education planning.

Beyond administering financial resources, VSAC provides college planning resources including guidance counselors to serve the secondary school system, implements early intervention and outreach programs to middle and high school-age students, and conducts research to better understand postsecondary aspirations, challenges, and motivations among students and parents. By building relationships with students as they progress through school, VSAC helps families plan and prepare for college, and is positioned to provide more effective aid to students.

Committing to student support

The **College of St. Joseph** in Rutland provides students with high-quality education at an affordable price. Since its inception in 1956, the independent, private liberal arts college has made a commitment that students who want to attend and are accepted to the school will not be deterred by financial concerns.

About 65% of the college's approximately 500 students are from Vermont, the highest percentage among independent colleges in the state. The college works to make education affordable, procuring financial aid for students in need, as well as streamlining institutional expenses, developing additional revenue streams, and adopting savvy business practices to control costs. Approaches include contracting out college facilities after school hours and during the summer, and maintaining a career-oriented curriculum that uses fieldwork to bridge classroom studies and career opportunities. The latter approach enhances student appeal to potential employers and reduces operating costs.

ISSUES OF INTEREST

The Income Bias

Nationwide, students with the most need are receiving less financial support as postsecondary costs continue to rise.

- Unmet financial need at four-year institutions grew by 80% among families with incomes less than \$34,000 from 1990–2004.
- Financial barriers are estimated to deter nearly half of all qualified low- and moderate-income high school graduates from enrolling in a four-year college program.



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THE NEED FOR

Guidance & Preparation

What makes a student ready to go on to college? Right now, perspectives differ among high schools and postsecondary institutions. When no one assumes responsibility for college preparation, students fall between the cracks. Too many of Vermont's students lose hope of attending college somewhere between ninth grade and 12th. And while college preparation options exist, their impact is compromised by disincentive, stigma, and lack of awareness.



the FACTS

Students Aren't Ready

- A disconnect exists between what college professors and high school teachers perceive as college readiness. Nationwide, 44% of college faculty members say incoming students are not well-prepared for college-level writing, compared to 90% of high school teachers who believe they are.
- Remediation costs, estimated at \$1 billion annually nationwide, place a burden on postsecondary institutions and students. Forty percent of all college students require some remediation in English or math.

the national average for SAT scores but lag in achieving college readiness, as determined by the College Board that administers the tests.

- While Vermont's high school graduation rate exceeds the national average, just 45% of Vermont students attend college immediately after graduation, compared to 57% nationally.

ATTENDING COLLEGE

45%

of Vermont students go to college immediately after graduating from high school

Spending Doesn't Translate to Achievement

- Vermont public schools spent \$2,268 more per pupil in the 2005–2006 school year than did public schools in New Hampshire. Despite the disparity in spending, Vermont and New Hampshire students posted nearly identical scores on math and reading tests widely accepted as national benchmarks.
- An assessment of 11th-grade students found that one in three Vermont students was not proficient in reading, seven in 10 were not proficient in math, and six in 10 were not proficient in writing.
- Vermont has one of the ten highest expenditures per student in the nation. Vermont students perform close to or on par with

Aspirations Suffer

- In Vermont, as in the rest of the country, middle school students are optimistic about higher education but lose momentum as they progress through high school. Nationwide, 92% of middle schoolers say they will definitely or probably attend college, compared to 66% who eventually begin studies at a two-year or four-year institution.
- Nearly 18% of Vermont high school students who decide not to attend college say they made that decision before ninth grade.

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PROMISING APPROACHES

Developing skills and strategies for success

An **Introduction to College Studies** course at the Community College of Vermont, offered to all Vermont high school students, seeks to build student aspirations for postsecondary education by exploring the skills and expectations necessary at the college level. Students develop time management, test-taking, communication, and study skills. The focus is on stress management and goal-setting, as well as learning to seek and use available informational resources.

The Community College of Vermont's **Access to Success** program helps students identify areas where they need improvement, and builds those academic skills prior to enrolling in college level courses.

Transforming aspirations—and achievement

College for Every Student, a national nonprofit based in Cornwall, Vermont, works to raise student aspirations and performance so that they can prepare for, gain access to, and succeed in college.

With a focus on underserved students in urban and rural areas, College for Every Student develops partnerships between schools and colleges to provide mentoring and student leadership programs. Emphasis is placed on improving academic performance and attendance, developing personal and academic goals, and ensuring that students graduate from high school and attend and succeed in college. College for Every Student seeks to offset the perceptions in many low-income families that often deter students from considering or pursuing college attendance.

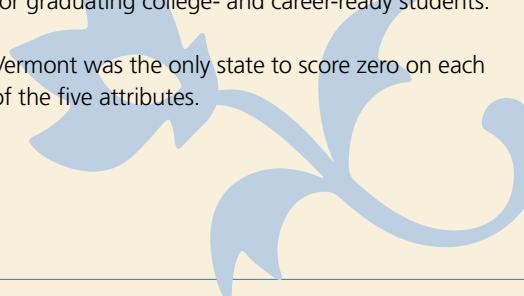
ISSUES OF INTEREST

The Expectations Gap

While Vermont prioritizes elementary and secondary education, one of the biggest unmet challenges in preparing students for postsecondary success lies in the need to align high school standards with college readiness expectations. *Closing the Expectations Gap 2008*, a study of state education systems, ranked Vermont as having the poorest standards in the country for improving college readiness among high school students.

Conducted by Achieve, Inc., an organization that seeks to improve state academic standards and achievement, the study evaluated five key attributes: alignment of high school standards with college and workplace expectations; alignment of high school graduation requirements with college and workplace expectations; administration of a college readiness test to all high school students; development of a system to track the outcomes and success of students throughout their educational careers; and accountability of high schools for graduating college- and career-ready students.

Vermont was the only state to score zero on each of the five attributes.



All sources and works cited are at www.understandingvt.org.

HOW

Philanthropy Can Help

A strong system of postsecondary education is Vermont's tradition and gift to students and communities across the country. Today, we have the opportunity to ensure this gift keeps giving for generations to come. Foundations and philanthropic individuals in particular are positioned to do what others cannot: identify needs, take reasoned risks, pilot innovations, and provide timely infusions of capital. When we're asked what donors in Vermont can do, the options within this section—along with other Promising Approaches highlighted in this report—are among those we suggest and support through our Access to Higher Education Fund. By building on proven programs and working together, we can shape a postsecondary paradigm of success for Vermont students and, ultimately, Vermont.



Boost Readiness Through Dual Enrollment

- Philanthropy can help improve student readiness and increase college affordability by investing in dual enrollment programs. These programs improve college access and success by exposing high school students to college-level courses—helping to build their confidence and identify remedial needs while they are still in high school, ultimately reducing their college costs.
- Several successful programs in Vermont demonstrate the positive impact of high school students participating in dual enrollment. Community College of Vermont offers the **Introduction to College Studies** program (see page 5) and Linking Learning to Life has the **College Connections** program (see page 7), both of which have grown significantly over the past few years. However, both programs—and others like them—are hampered by a lack of funding to transport students to and from classes, to promote the programs to high schools, and to build relationships between participating high schools and colleges.

Harness Vocational-Technical Resources

- Vocational-technical programs can inspire college readiness and provide an outstanding resource for Vermont's high school students, especially those who are interested in health care, technology, automotive, and design fields, among many others. Often, vocational-technical courses are taken in high school and count toward certification or degree attainment for some of the fastest growing jobs in the state—reducing college costs and time to employment. The courses provide cost-effective opportunities for many Vermont students and offer a level of workforce readiness not found in many other high school programs. Vermont has several nationally recognized programs among its regional vocational-technical centers.
- Philanthropy can support vocational-technical education by funding conferences to address issues such as the need for statewide efficiencies, curriculum alignment with certification requirements and workforce demands, and advocacy for policy and funding that favor these regional programs.

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FUND



Interested in how you can make a difference? The Vermont Community Foundation's **Access to Higher Education Fund** builds on the strategies and provides support for the programs and initiatives throughout this report.

To give to this fund, or to learn more, please contact us at 802-388-3355.

Build College Aspirations and Confidence in Vermont's Poorest Schools

- Philanthropy can support programs with successful track records in creating achievement-oriented cultures in schools. **College for Every Student** partners with elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as nearby colleges to help underserved students prepare for college (see page 5). In the 2007–2008 academic year, College for Every Student worked with 120 schools in 18 states, including one school in Vermont—Castleton Elementary, and its college partner, Castleton State College.
- With support through College for Every Student, schools work to create a culture of achievement and aspiration. Not only does this serve to empower students who are statistically less likely to achieve their dreams, it also seeks to help the economy and local communities by creating a larger pool of employable and engaged citizens. The college attendance rate for participating College for Every Student seniors is 96%—a rate achieved in dozens of schools each year.

Support Bricks and Mortar to Improve Affordability

- Growing pains at postsecondary institutions can impact student access. For example, **Vermont Technical College** anticipates turning away qualified students over the next few years as current facilities reach capacity. The cost of leasing or building to accommodate growth often is transferred to students through increases in tuition and fees. State support for these efforts has not lessened the burden.
- Philanthropy that supports capital efforts at Vermont Technical College and other schools can translate into cost savings for students and their families.

Invest in Students Facing the Biggest Obstacles

- Several colleges and nonprofit organizations have developed programs to support students in populations needing extra help in facing hurdles to college aspiration and success. These include students from foster and low-income families, as well as those who are the first in their family to pursue postsecondary education. **College of St. Joseph** (see page 3) has teamed with **VSAC** and the **Vermont Department for Children and Families** to launch a program—the first of its kind in the state—that identifies promising high school students in the foster care system and supports them through college with enhanced programming and aid. **Southern Vermont College, Champlain College** (see sidebar, this page) and the **University of Vermont**, among others, have developed financial aid programs designed to increase access for these targeted populations.

PROMISING APPROACHES

Opening access to opportunities

Through its **Vermont First** scholarship program, Champlain College is increasing the number of Vermont residents enrolled in the school and opening postsecondary access to students whose families have little or no experience with higher education. The program provides aid to Vermont residents who are the first in their families to attend college.

Vermont First is one way the college takes on a challenge familiar to many Vermont institutions—striking a balance between the numbers of out-of-state and Vermont students enrolled. While out-of-state student enrollment is necessary to help offset the lower tuition offered to Vermont students, it can also pose problems by leaving fewer spaces for Vermont students. In recent years, the majority of Champlain College's student body has been composed of out-of-state students. Through Vermont First, Champlain College seeks to create opportunities for first-generation college students and help build Vermont's workforce.

Improving readiness and affordability

College Connections offers opportunities to explore postsecondary education options for students in their sophomore, junior, and senior years of high school, as well as those in alternative education programs or who may have dropped out of school. Developed by Linking Learning to Life, a Burlington-based nonprofit that provides school-to-career opportunities for youth, the dual enrollment program allows students to take college courses at area institutions, while earning both high school and college credit for successful completion.

College Connections targets students facing significant barriers to college success, including those who would be the first in their families to attend college, those from low-income families, students learning English as a second language, minority students, and those with disabilities.

Good to Know

The field of higher education comprises many organizations, institutions, and options that students, families, and other stakeholders—including philanthropists—must understand and navigate to be successful. This section of *Understanding Vermont: Postsecondary Education* is provided as a high-level orientation to systems at work after high school. Visit www.understandingvt.org to learn more.



OPTIONS FOR VERMONT STUDENTS

Vermont Colleges and Universities

- Vermont has one research university, five public colleges and 17 private colleges.
- Vermont postsecondary institutions enroll a total of 42,198 students—19,480 from Vermont and 22,718 from outside of the state.
- Vermont college students are more likely to look out of state for their postsecondary education. Forty-two percent of first-time college freshmen in Vermont stayed in-state to attend college, compared to 84% of first-time freshmen nationwide.

Two- and Four-Year Institutions

- Vermont, as in most other states, provides three types of public colleges: community colleges that award two-year associate degrees; colleges that award bachelor's degrees; and a research university that also offers doctoral and advanced professional degree programs.
- The Vermont State Colleges include Community College of Vermont, Vermont Technical College, Johnson State College, Castleton State College, and Lyndon State College, almost all of which offer four-year degrees. (Community College of Vermont offers two-year programs.) The state also has 17 private colleges, which offer four-year and some master's degree programs; the University of Vermont is the state's sole research university.

Public vs. Private

- Public institutions traditionally are supported primarily by the state. In Vermont, the state provides about 8% of the University of Vermont's funding and about 20% of the funding for each of the five public colleges—a lower proportion than in nearly every other state in the country.
- Private colleges are supported primarily through tuition, fees, and contributions. They typically operate independently, though many build partnerships with other private colleges and, in Vermont, with state colleges.

Technical and Vocational-Technical Programs

- Technical colleges serve traditional college-age and adult students, providing vocational training in technical and mechanical fields, while vocational-technical programs provide classroom and practical experiences for high school students and workforce training for adults. Vermont has one postsecondary technical institute, Vermont Technical College, as well as 15 regional technical centers, and six comprehensive high schools—offering 64 career and technical programs.
- Vermont Technical College offers associate degrees in fields such as engineering design, agribusiness, software engineering, and nursing, as well as some four-year degrees.

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ISSUES OF INTEREST

The Growing Pressure on American Community Colleges

As forecasts continue to identify occupations with high-growth potential as requiring two-year degrees or training programs, the significance of community colleges in the postsecondary landscape will continue to increase. Of the 1,200 community colleges in the country, Vermont has just one: the Community College of Vermont.

- The number of associate degrees conferred annually is expected to rise from 568,000 in 2007 to 625,000 by 2011. Much of the success that students experience in seizing those job opportunities and furthering their educational pursuits depends on the ability of community colleges to address a wide variety of needs.
- More than 11.5 million students—about half of all undergraduates nationwide—are enrolled in the country's 1,200 community colleges. The schools attract high proportions of low-income, minority, and first-generation students.
- Students increasingly turn to community colleges to receive remedial education and to complete their first two years of college at a lower cost than at most traditional four-year institutions.

Learn. Lead. Grow. Together.

We look forward to helping you participate in peer learning opportunities, topical forums, and site visits to inform your grantmaking and connect you with others. We would be happy to facilitate meetings with our staff, other philanthropists, and nonprofit experts, as well as help you explore opportunities with other grantmakers to multiply the impact of your investments.

We encourage you to visit Understanding Vermont's website at www.understandingvt.org.

There, you'll find additional information about emerging trends in Vermont, and access a growing collection of resources for philanthropists and other grantmakers.

All sources and works cited are at www.understandingvt.org.

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