

Vermont Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education
Monday, January 11, 2021 - 3:30pm
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present:

Members: Sen. Baruth, Heather Bouchey, Sarah Buxton, Megan Cluver, Daniel Daley, Suresh Garimella, Scott Giles, Steve Gordon, Rep. James, Joyce Judy, Sandy Mayotte, Devin Tingle, Jeff Weld, Sophie Zdatny

Others: Sally Johnstone, Dennis Jones, Joyce Manchester, Brian Prescott, Michael Thomas, Candace Williams

Minutes:

- I. Review and discussion of changes to 12/4 report

See this version of the report posted to the Select Committee's website.

Affordability Standard:

Garimella: Surprised to see UVM included in the affordability reporting recommendation. 75% of UVM's state appropriation is allocated to aid for Vermont residents, half of which attend tuition-free. Given previous Select Committee meetings, it should proceed with its focus on the VSC institutions. UVM is much different from other flagship, research institutions and this type of reporting would have a cost.

Brian: Affordability is a student-focused metric and NCHEMS traditionally applies it broadly across a state's institutions.

Rep. James: That section is relevant to how the legislature allocates state aid, so it'd be helpful for the broad view, including UVM, to remain.

Buxton: Re: proposal of State Work Study Program, it reads as if we're contributing to making college more affordable but the stronger argument would be the connection they have to jobs and the pipeline development of workers for jobs.

Judy: What does the Select Committee think of this shared responsibility model for affordability? Have other states used it and how?

Prescott: Walks through the proposition of shared responsibility:

- Reasonable work hours for students
- Family contributions
- Pell grants
- State aid
- Institutional aid

- Other federal aid

Minnesota and Oregon use similar models to implement state financial aid and ration resources that often fall short of need.

Giles: Two important aspects about the standard how it helps structure the aid and its delivery. Most of these elements are a part of VSACs framework and VSCA can support it as a policy indicator.

Jones: Many free community college programs don't assist the poorest students because it doesn't factor the full cost of attendance. The standard is helpful for demonstrating the gaps students experience based on their income levels.

Buxton: If we put too much weight on this topic, we could complicate the public conversation.

Sen. Baruth: The heart of what we're looking at is affordability. UVM and the state colleges should be able to manage this, on balance.

Weld: Work study was presented as an affordability option but it wasn't feasible. As an employer, I want more engagement from interns than Work Study would provide. This program should not be included as an affordability solution.

Prescott: The Work Study program and reasonable student working hours in the standard are not linked. The Work Study program would be a new investment to help build connections with employers.

Giles: Student debt has not typically been used as an indicator for student/family affordability and burden. This could be another tool to communicate those issues.

Judy: The Select Committee should decide the scope of the report in certain sections, particularly related to an inclusive view with UVM.

Sen. Baruth: Appropriations conversations are always three-pronged (VSC, UVM, VSAC), so the affordability standard would be the place to continue that view.

Rep. James: This is a useful section and would be extremely useful for the legislature. It makes to keep UVM in in this context.

Cost of Inaction:

Sen. Baruth: I really like these additions, it helps makes the case for acting aggressively now.

Gordon: What were the definitions of short-term and medium-term?

Prescott: The \$19 million figure related to selling off NVU in a year with a 6-year period. The \$13 million estimate related to a similar timeframe for selling off just Lyndon.

Jones: It's safe to say that these numbers are on the low side.

Mayotte: This is a good section and it was helpful to see the discussion of the economic impact. I'd like to see a discussion of the impact on generational wealth within the state.

Rep. James: Points out section where additional information on economic impact could be added.

Buxton: An opposing view, quantifying the impact of a campus closure is very complex and may not even be possible due to the current state of the economy. It could be taken as speculative and potentially explosive. How does this quantification of a physical loss factor for a potentially more efficient and expansive education system?

Zdatny: We do know that some students are place bound and closing an institution would impact their generational outlook. VSC is one corporation with all four institutions linked, changes for one has a domino effect on the others.

Daley: Institutions also represent safe spaces for students, which is extremely valuable.

Additional Unification Content:

Rep. James: Would like reassurance from the state colleges that they feel these numbers are realistic and achievable.

Buxton: Re: number of high school graduates entering the system, is there really any low hanging fruit?

Judy: A report that assumes we'll have any enrollment and retention growth gives me pause.

Zdatny: There is an impending enrollment cliff in 2026, just at the end of the report's 5-year window.

Daley: In agreement, these projections are risky and all the factors are intertwined. Controlling tuition seems like the most likely tool for increasing enrollment.

Mayotte: Hearing the frame of the traditional student but there's great opportunity with underrepresented student populations.

Rep. James: I would need more reassurance around retention and the rationale behind it.

Prescott: There are quality issues around fewer faculty members across many programs.

Jones: The college going rate being as low as it is points to affordability being a factor.

Giles: VSAC's research points to academic preparation being a large factor on retention, so program investment is crucial.

Bouchev: This section should remain with discussion of the limitations of the approach.

Zdatny: The Trustees had a discussion on the report with much interest in VTC's place in the recommendation, its value proposition and identity.

II. Update on stakeholder engagement activities

Williams: Three focus groups will take place during the week of 1/25.

III. Next steps

IV. Public comments and questions

- a. Members of the public, please share comments and questions at higheredcommittee@leg.state.vt.us
- b. *Please be advised that with few exceptions, any submitted documents are open to the public*

See website for posted public comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Candace Williams
New England Board of Higher Education