

TO: The House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
FROM: Katherine Levasseur, Director of External and Governmental Affairs, Vermont State Colleges System
DATE: February 28, 2023
SUBJECT: Vermont State Colleges: Restorative Justice Request Summary

Within criminal-legal contexts, restorative practitioners assist victims, offenders, and impacted people with examining the harmful impact of a crime and determining what can be done to repair that harm while holding the person who caused it accountable for their actions.

In school systems, restorative practitioners are responsible for helping teachers, administrators, and other school personnel develop skills in relational and restorative ways of teaching and leading. Restorative practitioners facilitate conflict resolution circles and support peer mediation programs within the school systems.

Restorative practitioners also go on to do work in higher education systems, social policy, community development and advocacy, as well as international peacebuilding work.

B.S. degree in Criminal Justice with Restorative Justice concentration internships

Our students have obtained unique internships, working with the Caledonia County district attorney's office in collaboration with St. Johnsbury Community and Restorative Justice Center to facilitate "Youth Justice Panels." Youth Justice Panels are used to divert young people (ages 18-21 years) who have committed low level criminal offenses away from the traditional criminal-legal system. Student interns are working with all parties (offenders, victims, impacted community members) to develop ways for the young people to take accountability for their actions and repair the harm to all parties' satisfaction.

Summary of Evidence of Growth Potential

- With the distinctive focus on conflict resolution skills and trauma and resiliency, Restorative Justice graduates are well-positioned to serve in entry-level social service work. Counselors, social workers, and other community and social service specialists project a higher-than-average growth of 14% through 2029.
- RPK consulting presentations to the VSCS in Summer 2021 demonstrated similar projections: substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors predict a 17.7% job growth through 2028. Many of our Restorative Justice concentration graduates are already working in social service and behavioral health fields (ex: Northeast Kingdom Youth Services).
- This is a completely new occupational market of a "Restorative Justice Practitioner." Research conducted in May 2021 and presented to the Northeast Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences demonstrated the following active employment postings for restorative justice-related work: New Hampshire (24), Maine (20), Pennsylvania (68), Vermont (43), and New York (339).

- Vermont legislation is being created to mandate restorative practitioners in every K-12 school.

Bachelor's in Criminal Justice with Restorative Justice Concentration does not meet all current student and employer needs.

- A standalone Restorative Justice degree will give student entering social services, education, criminal justice, and/or legal fields an innovative credential that at this time cannot be earned anywhere.
- De-coupling Restorative Justice from Criminal Justice will make it easier for Restorative Justice students to obtain work in school districts (at this time, school districts are hesitant to hire our students with a B.S. degree in Criminal Justice, concentration in Restorative Justice).

Needs for Program Creation

- To facilitate a standalone restorative justice degree, Lyndon's Criminal Justice and Restorative Justice offerings would need to maintain at least 9-10 course offerings per semester. We traditionally offer 7-9 courses a semester.
- A separate, designated space for restorative facilitation work on campus. Employers are looking for hires that have direct experience facilitating restorative processes. Some of what students need to learn is how to create and prepare a restorative space/process. The room would not need to be as large as a classroom – the ability to fit 15 people at most.
- We would need institutional and administrative support regarding the expertise of restorative justice faculty. The study of restorative justice is a discipline, with theoretical tenets and applied practices. Restorative justice is not synonymous with social justice and the curriculum should not be used to combine courses from all existing social science programs.
- At least two new hires will be needed to facilitate an Associate's degree and a Bachelor's degree.

Summary:

- We propose establishing an associate's and bachelor's degree program, with a master's pathway to produce trained, workforce-ready professionals to assist the state in meeting its criminal justice needs.
- Funding would be used for program start-up costs, including the fit-up of classroom spaces and for two faculty members to establish the program. Additionally, we seek funding to offer scholarships to incentivize program enrollment for the first few cohorts of students.
- Funding requested is \$700,000 in one-time funds to support a two-year effort to stand up the program, and the initial participant scholarships at Vermont State University.