

1 Sec. 33. 16 V.S.A. chapter 90 is redesignated to read:

2 CHAPTER 90. FUNDING OF POSTSECONDARY ~~INSTITUTIONS~~
3 EDUCATION

4 Sec. 34. 16 V.S.A. § 2888 is added to read:

5 § 2888. VERMONT STRONG SCHOLARS PROGRAM

6 (a) Program creation. There is created a postsecondary tuition
7 reimbursement and internship program to be known as the Vermont Strong
8 Scholars Program designed to:

9 (1) encourage Vermonters to:

10 (A) select majors that prepare them for jobs that are critical to the
11 Vermont economy;

12 (B) enroll and remain enrolled in a postsecondary institution;

13 (C) live and work in Vermont upon graduation;

14 (2) reduce the costs for postsecondary education in targeted fields;

15 (3) provide experiential learning through internship opportunities with
16 Vermont employers; and

17 (4) support a pipeline of qualified talent for employment with
18 Vermont's employers.

19 (b) Fund creation. Pursuant to 32 V.S.A. chapter 7, subchapter 5, there is
20 created a special fund to be known as the Vermont Strong Scholars Fund,
21 which shall consist of amounts appropriated to the Fund, sums accepted for the

1 benefit of the Fund from private persons, and interest earned from the
2 investment of Fund balances. Any remaining balance at the end of the fiscal
3 year shall be carried forward in the Fund.

4 (2) The Fund shall be used and administered solely for the purposes of
5 this section, including:

6 (A) compensation and reimbursement of expenses for interns; and

7 (B) compensation for services of the Program Intermediary.

8 (c) Program management.

9 (1) The Secretary of Commerce and Community Development and the
10 Commissioner of Labor shall jointly develop and implement the organizational
11 details of the Program consistent with the purposes and requirements of this
12 section. The Secretary and Commissioner may adopt rules pursuant to
13 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 necessary to implement the Program.

14 (2) The Secretary and the Commissioner shall issue a request for
15 proposals for a person to serve as a Program Intermediary, who shall perform
16 the duties and responsibilities pursuant to the terms of a performance contract
17 negotiated by the Secretary, Commissioner, and Intermediary.

18 (3) The Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the
19 Department of Labor, the regional development corporations, and the Program
20 Intermediary, shall have responsibility for building connections within the

1 business community to ensure broad private sector participation in the
2 Program.

3 (4) The Program Intermediary shall:

4 (A) identify and foster postsecondary internships that are rigorous,
5 productive, well-managed, and mentored;

6 (B) cultivate relationships with employers, employer-focused
7 organizations, and state and regional government bodies;

8 (C) build strong relationships and familiarity with Vermont
9 postsecondary institutions, their programs, and curricula.

10 (D) create and maintain a registry of participating employers and
11 associated internship opportunities;

12 (E) coordinate and provide support to the participating student, the
13 employer, and the student's postsecondary institution;

14 (F) develop and oversee a participation contract between each student
15 and employer, including terms governing the expectations for the internship, a
16 work plan, mentoring and supervision of the student, reporting by the employer
17 and student, and compensation terms.

18 (d) Academic majors; projections.

19 (1) Annually, on or before November 15, the Secretary and the
20 Commissioner, in consultation with the Vermont State Colleges, the University
21 of Vermont, the Corporation, and the Secretary of Education, shall identify

1 eligible postsecondary majors, projecting at least four years into the future,

2 that:

3 (A) are offered by the Vermont State Colleges, the University of
4 Vermont, or Vermont independent colleges; and

5 (B) lead to jobs the Secretary and Commissioner have identified as
6 critical to the Vermont economy.

7 (2) The Secretary and Commissioner shall prioritize the identified
8 majors and shall select a similar number of associate's degree and bachelor's
9 degree programs. A major shall be identified as eligible for this Program for
10 no less than two years.

11 (3) Based upon the identified majors and projected participation rates,
12 the Secretary of Administration shall annually provide the General Assembly
13 with the estimated cost of operating the Program during the then-current fiscal
14 year and each of the four following fiscal years.

15 (e) Qualifying internships.

16 (1) Criteria. To qualify for participation in the Program an internship
17 shall at minimum:

18 (A) be with a Vermont employer as approved by the Program
19 Intermediary in consultation with the Secretary and Commissioner;

20 (B) pay compensation to an intern of at least \$15.00 per hour [unless
21 otherwise waived by the Secretary and Commissioner]

1 (C) meet the quality standards and expectations as established by the
2 Program Intermediary.

3 (2) Compensation. The Program Intermediary shall coordinate
4 compensation for participating students as appropriate on a case-by-case basis
5 as follows:

6 (A) the participating student shall be classified as an employee of the
7 participating employer, shall be compensated directly by the employer, and the
8 employer shall be reimbursed by the Program Intermediary; or

9 (B) the participating student shall be classified as an employee of the
10 Program Intermediary and shall be assigned to an employer by the
11 Intermediary.

12 (f) Student eligibility.

13 (1) An individual shall be eligible for tuition reimbursement under this
14 section if he or she:

15 (A) participates in one or more qualifying internships or otherwise
16 has a significant work experience in his or her field with a Vermont employer;

17 (B) is a graduate of a Vermont postsecondary institution;

18 (C) does not hold a prior bachelor's degree;

19 (D) was awarded an associate's or bachelor's degree in a field
20 identified by the Secretary and Commissioner pursuant to this section;

1 (E) completed the associate’s degree within three years or the
2 bachelor’s degree within five years;

3 (F) is employed in Vermont in a field or specific position closely
4 related to the identified degree within 12 months of graduation; and

5 (G) remains a Vermont resident for 12 months following his or her
6 tuition reimbursement.

7 (2) Notwithstanding any provision of this section to the contrary, a
8 Vermont resident who attends a postsecondary institution outside of Vermont
9 shall be eligible for tuition reimbursement upon finding and approval by the
10 Program Intermediary that the student:

11 (A) has selected an academic major and is enrolled in an academic
12 program that is substantially similar to a program approved by the Secretary
13 and the Commissioner under subsection (d) of this section; and

14 (B) otherwise meets the eligibility criteria of this section.

15 (g) Tuition reimbursement.

16 (1) An eligible individual shall receive tuition reimbursement as
17 follows:

18 (A) for an individual awarded an associate’s degree by an eligible
19 institution, in an amount equal to the tuition rate for 15 credits at the
20 Community College of Vermont during the individual’s final semester of
21 enrollment, to be prorated over the three years following graduation; and

1 (B) for an individual awarded a bachelor’s degree by an eligible
2 institution, in an amount equal to the in-state tuition rate at the Vermont State
3 Colleges during the individual’s final year of enrollment, to be prorated over
4 the five years following graduation;

5 (2) Tuition may be reimbursed on a prorated basis to an otherwise
6 eligible Vermont resident who transfers to and is graduated from an eligible
7 institution.

8 (3) The payment of tuition reimbursement under this section is subject
9 to funding available for the awards.

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