

Vermont State Colleges: Tuition Discount for Senior Citizens

Testimony, Senate Education Committee, 3/28, 2016

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Thank you for the opportunity to report about the Vermont State Colleges' new tuition policy for senior citizens, a policy we hope will help us serve more Vermont senior students.

The VSC remain laser-focused on our two imperatives: our mission to provide affordable, high-quality, accessible college education for the benefit of Vermont. We are also focused on reforms that are helping us deliver on our mission, expand opportunities for students, and put us on solid financial footing.

How are we accomplishing this? On the expense side, our instructional costs have decreased by \$10 million between FY14 and FY15. We have 175 fewer employees than we did in 2015. Services shared across the system, like IT, Human Resources, legal services, joint purchasing contracts, are helping us reach our efficiency goals. New strategic alliances between Lyndon State and Johnson State and between Community College of Vermont and VT Technical College, have great potential to reduce duplication of resources between colleges.

On the revenue side, each of our colleges are expanding their grants work, their fundraising, and their entrepreneurial programs, like the Castleton Polling Institute, which generate revenue. These initiatives are designed to reduce the pressure on tuition rates, which account for 85% of our revenue.

In this spirit of entrepreneurship, we see an opportunity to expand what we do with the rapidly growing number of Vermonters entering their senior years. While the number of traditional-age, college-bound students in Vermont is continuing to decline, the number of Vermonters between the ages of 65 and 79 will increase by 75,000 between 2010 and 2030.

We hope our new policy -- half price tuition for Vermonters 60 and over -- will increase the number of seniors taking courses at our colleges. Effective for Fall 2016, it includes changes we believe will appeal to a broader audience:

- The current policy is limited to Vermonters ages 65 and older. The new policy applies to all individuals aged 60 and older.
- The current policy is limited to two courses per semester and to individuals not seeking a degree. The new policy removes limits on total courses per semester and allows individuals to earn credits toward undergraduate degrees or certificates at half price.

We believe the new policy -- with the substantial discount in tuition -- will appeal to growing numbers of Vermonters over 60, many of whom may still be working and want to pursue a degree.

The number of elders who are taking courses right now is small; in 2015 a total of 78 courses were provided free to seniors across our system. We plan to publicize this new opportunity in the near future. That, combined with the expanding numbers of elders, will very likely increase the numbers of people interested in taking our courses, either for fun or credit.

While we plan to benefit from increased enrollment, we will also benefit by having more seniors participating in our classes. Seniors enrich our course discussions with their experiences and with unique and rich perspectives. Their presence is positive, and welcome.

Thank you again for your interest. Please be assured that we will be reviewing the input we have received from current senior students and from your committee with our relevant committees and Board to consider whether adjustments to the new policy should be made.