



Castleton University

Testimony before the Commerce Committee—Castleton University

Dr. Karen M. Scolforo, President

Castleton University has served as a regional economic engine since 1787. We meet the needs of employers, as is evident in our consistently high graduate employment rates (e.g. our most recent alumni survey showed 91% employed within six months of graduation, 61% in their chosen field, and 79% reported being very satisfied with their employment). Castleton has over 400 business partners—so far—and through these partnerships, we are able to develop and modify curriculum to meet specific needs. We are nimble and responsive to today’s employment needs.

Traditionally, Castleton has primarily served high school graduates from Vermont who either reside on campus or commute for affordability reasons.

Two major shifts

It is time we expand our reach—we must serve a broad population of nontraditional students through on-site offerings and distance education. We offer a growing number of internships—almost all of our programs now require internships for graduation (new this year)—and these experiences encourage our graduates to plant roots in Vermont. 66% of last year’s graduates remain in the state of Vermont, and contribute to the economic vitality of our region and state.

It is time we expand our program offerings, with a laser focus on opportunities that will not only retain students in Vermont, but draw students from outside our boundaries, providing incentive for them to stay here.

We are doing this by offering a series of competitive scholarships—on our own—that allow students to pursue a high quality affordable education in Vermont. This approach has meant exponential increases in tuition scholarships year over year for the past decade.

Castleton University and Workforce Development

Current Workforce Programming

Castleton University offers a variety of programs that require state or national certification and/or contribute to workforce development in our region and state: Education (state certification), Nursing (national certification), Computer Information Systems; Business programs, including accounting, marketing, management, project management

Initiatives—

We are the economic engine for our region with almost 500 employees, almost 2000 students, and tens of thousands of alumni. But, we need funding to pursue new program development (faculty and labs); we need funds for additional faculty (existing programs) to prepare for programmatic accreditation and

national certification opportunities for our students; we need funds to hire clinical internship specialists to make those critical connections with our employers. As an institution that depends on its tuition for over 90% of its funding, if we are going to advance initiatives in regional workforce development, we need the state to support these efforts financially. We face funding challenges that directly impacts our ability to enroll students.

We are exploring new program development to directly meet the needs of our regional employers, Some examples include: Occupational Therapy Assistant and Physical Therapy Assistant (associates degree programs with average annual salary, upon graduation, of \$58-62K; both requiring national certification); accelerated nursing programs, undergraduate and graduate; Computer Science and certifications; expansion of school psychology program (graduate level)—desperately needed in our region and across the country We need to hire additional, doctorally-prepared clinicians if we are going to pursue programmatic accreditation, which ultimately will provide our graduates with a direct route to national certification and draw students from across the globe).

An investment in workforce development for Castleton University and the Vermont State Colleges will result in exponential benefits for the region and the state.

If the state of Vermont is going to thrive—if your constituents are going to thrive—you must invest in workforce development; the most effective bang for your buck is to invest in the Vermont State Colleges System, for we are truly experts in workforce development.