



ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT  
INDEPENDENT COLLEGES

*...independent thinking for a collaborative world*

**To: House Education Committee**  
**From: Susan Stitely, President**  
**Re: Private Higher Education Update During COVID-19**  
**Date: April 10, 2020**

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### **Students Remaining on Campus**

Although most students are no longer on campus, many international students cannot go home and some U.S.-based students without homes are living on campuses. Essential staffs are reporting to work to provide services in dining, buildings and grounds, and campus safety. The colleges are requiring students to observe state restrictions.

The total number of students on AVIC member campuses is 609:

Champlain College:	130
St. Michael's College:	126
Bennington College:	116
Norwich University:	100
Middlebury College:	85
Landmark College:	25
VCFA:	10
Sterling College:	9
Marlboro College:	8

### **Challenges & Success with Remote Learning**

Technologically, the colleges are doing well with remote learning. Many faculty and students have pivoted to remote learning with resiliency and creativity. The online structure that many colleges already had in place helped facilitate that process. This is particularly true for institutions like Champlain College and Norwich that had strong online studies.

However, Vermont's lack of internet infrastructure is a problem for some of our colleges and is a problem that needs to be addressed by government. For students, broadband access in rural areas is a challenge and can be isolating. Many students at home have weak wifi signals and need printers and other resources.

Students have been through a lot this semester including relocating, the cancellation of commencements, and the unexpected transfer to online learning which can be difficult for some students. In addition, focusing on schoolwork from home or far away from campus can be difficult for a variety of reasons. The colleges have support staff available to help students. For example, **SIT** provides self-care workshops and extra support from tele-mental counselors. **VLS** has created a mental health team as a resource for wellbeing exercises, advice, and community chats. Virtual counseling is offered on topics such as managing anxiety and fear in uncertain time and isolated connectedness. A **St. Michael's** student is struggling and staff are reaching out to support that student and keep him/her connected to the campus and support systems. **Norwich University** is providing counseling online as are other colleges.

**Landmark College's** programs are based on personalized learning and individualized attention to students. This is not easy to replicate online. However, they have more than six years experience with online classes for students with learning disabilities and that is serving as a foundation during this crisis. Student life programming is online including: the Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS) for autistic students; centers for diversity and inclusion; and student clubs. Still it is not easy for the students, faculty or staff and counseling and advising are available.

College staff at every institution is doing their best to support students and help with this transition.

Future planning for the colleges is an extreme a challenge. Those institutions with summer programs are moving them online. There is an expectation that some students may drop out this semester and that fall enrollment by drop by 30%. Colleges are developing three scenario budgets: 1. reopening in the fall; 2. being online in the fall; and 3. being online all of next year.

The federal CARES Act is providing some help but the funds are not adequate given the losses that colleges are and will be facing. More financial help is needed.

### **Crisis Support to the State, Hospitals, and Local Communities**

**Bennington College** has had conversations with Southern Vermont Medical Center to be a Point of Distribution (POD) if needed.

**Goddard College** is working with the State Emergency Operation Center to consider housing vulnerable populations recovering from COVID-19 who do not need hospitalization.

**Landmark College** was a temporary site for COVID-19 testing by the National Guard.

**Marlboro College** had initial discussions with Brattleboro Memorial Hospital to house their clinic staff, but it may not be necessary.

**Middlebury College** has an agreement with Porter Medical Center to house healthy employees should the need arise.

**Norwich University** offered to house and feed local EMT's. Should cold storage be needed the ice rink will be made available. They have donated more than 16 cases of gloves, dozens of laboratory goggles, 6 tubs of sanitizing wipes as well as hand sanitizer to local hospitals. They have paid their gift of \$200,000 to the town early to help with cash flow.

**St. Michael's** is talking with UVMMC about housing medical workers and they are working with local police departments to strengthen common dispatch services. They have been contacted by the National Guard to use their sports complex as a field hospital. Additionally, they have offered the Department of Health a testing machine for use in diagnosing the virus.

**SIT's** parent headquarters is supporting local first responders (Brattleboro Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services) by providing them with safe and clean dormitory space in the event that their personnel are exposed to COVID-19 while on the front lines of this fight. Discussions are ongoing with the Brattleboro Memorial Hospital and The Brattleboro Retreat to potentially provide dormitory space. They are in regular contact with the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force and Emergency Operations Center as well as our local Emergency Operations Center, and have shared details of facilities on campus and capacity, so they are able to make decisions on how the campus can best support their response and the community in southern VT.

**Sterling College** is supporting its local food shelf and both **VCFA** and **VLS** have offered their campuses as available surge space if required.

**S. 224 (Draft No 8.1): Post-secondary Educational Institutions; Closings**

AVIC respectfully requests the Committee to strike Section 175 (a)(1) on page 1 and Section 2 Transition pages 4 and 5.

Unlike the State Colleges, AVIC is not a unified college system that maintains control over its members. Each private college is separate and independent. If a farmer who is a member of the Vermont Farm Bureau has a costly environmental regulation violation that he/she cannot pay, would you be asking the members of the Farm Bureau to be responsible? I suspect not. Similarly private colleges should not be responsible for another private college's costs.

The proposed legislation is based on one unique incident, the closure of Burlington College that did not ensure its records were adequately maintained. Since the time, AVIC has developed a Records Retention Policy that all members have adopted. Additionally, we have been working with Parchment (a third-party vendor) to discuss a group rate for maintenance of academic records. We have recently seen the closure of four additional colleges (Green Mountain College, Southern Vermont College, College of St. Joseph, and Marlboro College). All those colleges' academic records have been adequately transitioned to other institutions.

On page 2 of Draft No 8.1 – S.224, (2)(A) provides new safeguards for ensuring a process to protect academic records. The safeguards are triggered when an institution is placed on probation. We support this approach.