

Rebecca Buck

From: Balcom, Ian N. <ian.balcom@northernvermont.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, February 12, 2020 3:52 PM
To: Theresa Utton-Jerman; Rebecca Buck; Jane Kitchel; Kitty Toll
Subject: The role of higher education in the economy of Vermont

Dear Sen. Kitchel and Rep. Toll,

I am writing to advocate for my students and ask that you increase the funding of the Vermont State Colleges.

Having been a professor at NVU Lyndon (LSC) for the past ten years, I have been continually amazed at the lack of support our college age students have in Vermont. Here at Lyndon, we cater primarily to a first-in-family college student population. Who, in addition to the lack of financial support from society, often is left without the support of their family. Most often, the lack of family support is not intentional, but rather due to their not knowing the system that is higher education, in addition to their inability to financially support their children. The combination of these two gaps of support results in a tremendous burden of stress and instability among our students. They cannot focus on their classes because they are working, commuting, worrying about where to get basic necessities and how to pay tuition. This results in the worst possible outcome of a college career: huge load of debt, without much knowledge retention.

My for you question is: what does the legislature of Vermont see as a role for higher education in the future of our state and our economy. We are currently standing by watching colleges close after serving as central pillars of their local economies and culture for as long as anyone can remember. Do we stand idly by while more shut their doors? What would the economic and social impact be on the NEK if NVU Lyndon closed?

I have a specific proposal for you to consider:

If higher education were free for all who have residency in VT it would serve as a catalyst for economic growth across the state. We could become a destination for families to send their kids to college. A safe, green, fun, supportive place to go to college. Free tuition for all who live in VT. "Send your kids to VT for college."

The influx of money from out-of-state families would revolutionize local economies and perhaps the entire state of VT. It would make the Vermont brand grow to include more than syrup, cheese, snow, and leaves. We could be the higher education state. A firmly rooted knowledge economy. Many who came, would choose to stay thereby alleviating the demographic issues we currently face.

I am all but certain that the math would prove that this investment would return many fold more than invested. For example, it is estimated that for every dollar a government invests in higher education, there is a return of \$ 7.46.

Even if this simple calculation is off some, it is difficult for me to imagine the justification for the divestment from higher education in Vermont that has occurred since 1980s.

To be fair, there are alternative proposal out there, most of which revolve around the concept of minimization. This is not a goal that produced positive results. If we want to shrink our higher ed. system, then minimize. If we want our children to leave Vermont to go to college elsewhere, then minimize. But if we want to attract and retain college age students, cutting costs, eliminating tenure, and centralizing management are undermining this goal.

Thank you for considering my thoughts on this subject, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss important issue in more detail. Please do not hesitate to call me should you have the time.

Best,
Ian

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