

Testimony for NEK Day at the Statehouse 1.28.2020

Provost Nolan Atkins, Northern Vermont University

Thank you for your consideration. I appreciate your support of Northern Vermont University and of the Northeast Kingdom.

I am a resident of St. Johnsbury, and have taught at NVU, then known as Lyndon State College, since 1997. I served as the chair of Lyndon's nationally recognized Atmospheric Sciences Department, before serving as the interim dean of academic affairs for 18 months and then interim president during the 2016-17 academic year. I am honored to be NVU's first provost. I am responsible for managing academic programs, administering the review process for faculty promotion and tenure, overseeing development of courses and degree programs, and other essential aspects of academic policy and procedure across NVU.

NVU combines nationally recognized liberal arts and professional programs with hands-on, high-impact experience, tailored to the working world. Students participate in internships, travel, and collaborative research throughout their college career here. As an example, our students are conducting research to understand how ski areas are adapting their services to reduce their environmental impact. Our atmospheric science students provide weather forecast information to the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) to help maintain safe roadways throughout Vermont and have done so for the past 15 years. Ninety-five percent of our seniors participate in an internship or practicum as part of their studies and the feedback from our community partners in this initiative has been very positive.

This combination of liberal arts and high-impact, practical experience results in success for our students as they begin their careers. They have developed the soft skills employers demand – creative and critical thinking, communication, problem solving, teamwork and collaboration, and research. And employers are able to hire the staff they need for their local businesses—banks, resorts, health and human service agencies, schools, law enforcement, weather stations, and more. We continue to work closely with local businesses to continue to offer programs that help meet their workforce development needs.

NVU – just 18.5 months into unification – is innovating for the future and meeting students where they are at – through our campus-based programs and through the expansion of NVU Online. Nearly 50% of our students are first in family; 76% of NVU Online students are Vermonters. NVU's Online offerings include masters, bachelors, two-year degree programs, and certificate programs, designed to create a strong workforce for employers across all industries. We currently offer 16 fully online degree and certificate programs and our offerings are expanding.

NVU's Center for Professional Studies delivers boot-camp-style skills training to meet the complex needs of adult learners and is a valuable option for mid-career professionals seeking additional training or certification. Classes like data analytics, project management, and Microsoft skills provide workforce readiness that is in high demand by employers across all industries. Employers like the bite-sized learning in specific skills areas and customization that NVU offers with our Center for Professional Studies. Kingdom East Supervisory Union, Mobile Medical Corporation, Revision Military, Mount Snow, Burke Mountain and Smugglers' Notch resorts are among the institutions NVU has recently helped with

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This fall, we are launching a new degree in data science and a Master's in Education with a concentration in digital media instruction in collaboration with Discovery Education - NVU graduates are and will continue to be experts at the cutting edge of K-12 education. NVU also offers one of the nation's only climate change science degrees.

NVU's Do North Coworking space in downtown Lyndonville is another example of how NEK collaborations are helping to revitalize downtown, encourage entrepreneurship, and attract local, state and federal investment in the region. Do North Coworking provides rentable office facilities with high-speed internet for startup founders, creatives, digital technology professionals, and remote workers. Collaborators include: Kingdom Trails, North Country Federal Credit Union, Northeastern Vermont Development Association, Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital, Northern Counties Health Care, Lyndon State College Foundation, Passumpsic Savings Bank, United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Development, United States Economic Development Association, United States Northern Border Regional Commission, and the Vermont Center for Emerging Technology.

NVU continues to work closely with local businesses to refine current programs and create new programs to meet future workforce needs. At the same time, our faculty and staff remain committed to nurturing curious, motivated, and engaged students on their paths to success and their places in the world. We never stop asking "what's next?"

As Vermont looks for innovative ways to keep young adults in-state and to attract new residents, I encourage you to consider investing more in higher education; it is an excellent return on investment. Thank you again for your support of NVU and the Northeast Kingdom.