

Creative Sector Day Testimony

Government Operations Committee

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1. Intro

- a. We are here to talk about [Champlain College](#) and the college's role as a driver of innovation and creativity in Vermont. For those of you who don't know, Champlain College is a small, professionally-focused, private college in Burlington, Vt, with approx 1800 students enrolled in our traditional residential undergraduate programs. Today, we'll focus on the academic programs and experiential learning opportunities that feed the VT Creative economy

2. About Us

- a. [Sarah Jerger](#) is the director of the Emergent Media Center and has a 15 year career in higher education in the creative technology space. She is also a multi-disciplinary artist exploring many mediums and analog-digital intersections. As a community-driven project, Sarah also operates and curates a free little art gallery in Essex Junction that saw over 800 pieces of tiny art exchanged in its first year.
- b. [Robin Perlah](#) is the assistant dean of the Creative Studio, which includes our art & design programs and is an Associate Professor in Graphic Design program. She also is the academic director of the Emergent Media Center. A professional and fine-art photographer, Robin also is the former vice-chair of the Vermont Art Council's board of trustees and has a 20 year + career in Vermont that intersects art, technology, and both k-12 and post-secondary art education.

3. Academics

4. Creative Studio

- a. The [Creative Studio](#) is an academic unit that encompasses the creative media, communication and design degrees at Champlain College. The goal of the Creative Studio is to better prepare students for interdisciplinary creative careers and to support collaboration, both in class and extracurricular, between students, faculty, and creative industries.
- b. The ease with which students can take courses in other creative majors is a differentiator for Champlain, as is the number of minors we have that share courses across majors. Additionally, the Creative Studio gives students in these majors a sense of belonging that is larger than just their own majors and opens up a wider variety of opportunities throughout their four years: social, professional and academic.

5. Creative Studio Majors

- a. Currently the Creative Studio includes Animation, Broadcast Media Production, Communication, Creative Media, Filmmaking, Graphic Design & Visual Communication, Interaction Design, Marketing Communication, and Professional Writing.

b. Many of our students go on to have careers in the Creative Sector in Vermont. A quick search of my LinkedIn network showed our graduates in creative jobs in Vermont companies that include:

- i. OnLogic
- ii. City of Burlington
- iii. Seventh Generation
- iv. Stowe
- v. NorthCountry Bank
- vi. Eternity Web
- vii. New Chapter
- viii. Burton
- ix. Harvey-Severance
- x. Fuse
- xi. Solidarity of Unbridled Labour
- xii. Dealer.com
- xiii. Scout Digital
- xiv. 1% for the Planet
- xv. Governor's Institute of Vermont
- xvi. Sticky Brand
- xvii. Commando
- xviii. Sugarbush
- xix. Tata Harper

6. [Game Studio](#)

a. The game industry is a multi-billion dollar industry. It encompasses the traditional entertainment sector including AAA companies like EA, Blizzard, and Ubisoft. It also includes a broad range of industries such as:

- i. Serious games - like Akili, the first company with an FDA approved prescription game treatment for juvenile ADHD
- ii. Simulations - for the military, or the aviation and aeronautics complex.
- iii. Gamification for marketing and PR
- iv. Transferable skills into everything from software development to 3D product visualization

b. Our studio mimics industry. Students first learn how to work with teammates from their own program. Learning the basics of communication, and being introduced to the pipelines and processes for good collaboration. This sequence prepares students to be work-ready for internships and employment.

7. GS Majors

a. To create the "Game Studio" we draw students from 3 divisions and 6 academic programs:

- i. CCM - Game Art, Game Design, Game Sound Design
- ii. Stiller School of Business - Game Production Management and Game Business and Publishing
- iii. Information, Technology and Sciences - Game Programming

- b. Game Studio graduates often leave Burlington, which is why this list of employers is much shorter than the Creative Studio list. That being said, we have had some notable success with companies such [Gametheoryco](#), [Rad Magpie](#) and [Sundae Month](#), all launched by Champlain grads. Gametheoryco, a women-led organization, began as an indie entertainment game company, but has transitioned into the serious and educational game space, partnering with organizations to create games for education and research. Rad Magpie, also women and non-binary led, is a 501(c)3 nonprofit “doing its part to dismantle the patriarchy and white supremacy through uplifting underrepresented video game developers,” which they accomplish through education and game production. Sundae Month is an indie game developer, which emerged from a student team’s capstone project. Also, it is interesting to note that as with many other tech industries, remote work for games has exploded since the pandemic. A quick look through my linkedin confirmed that many recent game studio graduates are staying put in Burlington while working remotely for AAA game companies. Montreal, less than two hours from Burlington, has a thriving game industry, and with our Champlain graduates staying put to work remotely, we see opportunity to engage and harness that creative spirit and expand upon the slowly emerging indie game industry here in Vermont.
- 8. Experiential Learning
 - a. Learning by doing is a cornerstone of a career-focused Champlain College education. A prime example of our experiential learning is at our Centers of Experience.
- 9. Emergent Media Center
 - a. Champlain College has several Centers of Experience (you might be familiar with another one of our centers, [the Leahy Center for Digital Forensics & Cybersecurity](#)). The Emergent Media Center was founded in 2006 by Professor Ann DeMarle. Since its inception, the EMC has employed over 1000 students, completed over 100 projects, and partnered with over 60 clients, including some familiar Vermont organizations, such as UVM College of Medicine, ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Burlington International Airport, VT Teddy Bear, King Street Center, and OVR Technology).
 - b. The EMC is a creative studio primarily focused on applied research and experimentation, using novel applications of emerging technologies, immersive media and human-centered design (HCD) processes to design creative solutions to challenges brought by community partners. Applied research areas may include: serious games and simulation, embodied systems, AR/VR/MR/XR, mobile apps, assistive and adaptive technologies, and physical computing, to name just a few. Research and development areas are determined by grant opportunities and other sponsorship, as well as originating from faculty interest and expertise. In addition to technological exploration, this research can be applied to addressing “wicked problems” in a design-for-good model. In other words, research topics may be determined by the technology itself or the societal problem needing creative solutions. This work falls into three categories: *Studio Projects*, *the Champlain Maker Program*, and *Design Thinking Consultation Services*.

10. About the Emergent Media Center

- a. The [Emergent Media Center at Champlain College](#) is a student-driven interactive media studio that offers paid professional experiences for students from all majors. Students conceptualize, prototype, and produce a wide range of creative media to solve challenges brought to us by community partners. When we say “emergent”, we mean exploring new and up-and-coming technologies and also using existing technologies in new and novel ways. Outputs of this applied research and experimentation might include serious games, mobile apps, augmented reality, virtual reality, assistive and adaptive technologies, and other interactive experiences.
- b. Our teams consist of students with both technical and creative skills, working collaboratively to explore and produce really cool, cutting-edge work - the work of the future, work that innovatively solves problems. They’re applying, enhancing, and expanding on what they’re learning in their majors and working in cross-disciplinary teams, just like they will in the professional workplace. This is a paid job for the students, outside of their academic work, that offers a stepping stone to the world beyond college.
- c. For partners (our clients), we offer the creative and “beginners’ minds” of students and their technical know-how to solve some of our partners’ most vexing challenges. And we offer reassurance to both partners and students that the work is supported by our EMC team of professional staff and faculty.

11. EMC Examples

- a. Two recent examples of our work in the community are our partnerships with [BETA Technologies](#) and [Vermont Symphony Orchestra](#).
- b. We are all likely familiar with BETA, the renowned electric aerospace manufacturer here in Vermont. Their cutting edge technology is incredible but might be hard to understand for the average person. To help ease this challenge, our students created an animated game prototype that helps visitors to Beta learn about the primary functions of Beta’s novel ALIA aircraft.
- c. We also recently completed year one of a three-year partnership with the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. In an effort to appeal to younger audiences, VSO is tapping our students to create a visual media experience that will be projected inside the Flynn theater to accompany their winter concerts. This year, the students created short experimental films. Next year, we’re building on the project with motion graphics and projection mapping - having moving images interplay with the architecture - moving beyond a rectangular screen and creating a more immersive artistic experience.
- d. Community partnerships like this through the Emergent Media Center offer students hands-on real-world experience in their field of study and with Vermont organizations. Vermont businesses and nonprofits benefit from the skills and talents of these creative young people, while also being tapped into a rising workforce. With this career-focused approach, we aim to lift the creative and tech economies of Vermont.

12. What’s Next for Champlain

- a. Champlain College’s 2030 Strategic Plan outlines a strong vision and future for the college and Vermont. Highlights include:

- i. Continuing to build on Champlain’s unrivaled career-forward education
 - ii. Deepening and broadening Champlain’s role in the economic development of Vermont by expanding steady employment pipelines between Vermont-based organizations and students.
 - iii. In addition to outstanding results in job placement of graduates, Champlain will identify and support professionally focused experiential learning, teach skills relevant to career success, develop a robust alumni job network, and research emerging career fields to inform new program development. Champlain will continue to serve as an engine for the Vermont economy.
- b. As the strategic plan directly aligns with the College’s work in the Vermont Creative Section, this includes the design and implementation of new creative studio majors (such as Interactive Narrative and Product Design), expanded partnerships with organizations such as [Generator](#) (Burlington’s community maker space), investments in new technology, such as a virtual production stage with expanded immersive media tools and motion capture.
- c. Champlain has always been an [engine of creativity and innovation in Vermont](#). From its humble beginnings as the Burlington Business school in 1878, we have constantly evolved in response to the needs of Vermont, eventually becoming the school we know today: widely known and respected for its game, technology and design programs. Change is in our DNA (and in our motto (“Audeamus” or “Let Us Dare”)). In our next phase, we seek to leverage and expand Champlain’s presence in the South End of Burlington and to grow our Lakeside campus. This will include partnerships with [Hula](#), local businesses, and arts organizations in this emerging creative innovation sector. While we don’t yet know what the next chapter of Champlain’s continued success and growth in Vermont will look like yet, we know that it will be an integral part of Burlington’s [South End Innovation District](#) and that the arts will continue to be a driving force in our vision and impact.