

COMMONS

PREVIEW

Vermont Commons School, college preparatory education in South Burlington for grades 7-12



Message From Dexter Mahaffey

Students, families, and the faculty of Vermont Commons School are drawn here for a variety of reasons: our exceptional academic community built on small class sizes and collaborative relationships with teachers, our experiential education methodology, our three-fold ethic of environmental stewardship, global citizenship, and service near and far, among others. But what unifies us all is our belief that we cannot simply go through the motions of education.

Vermont Commons School is about shirking typical educational practice in a belief that our community-based, personalized approach to learning, and our eye towards doing good is best both for our students and the world they will inherit. And if the idea of the Commons is a wealth of local resources shared among our community, then surely our chief asset must be the curiosity, discriminating eye, and initiative brought to bear by our students and teachers. While many debate what furniture creates the best 21st-century learning environment, we will instead continue to place our emphasis on discovering the interests and potential of each of our students and striving to create unique opportunities for their pursuit in classes, in our greater Burlington community, and beyond. Truly, the best college (and life) preparation is to focus not on some hypothetical moment in the future, but rather on a thoughtful pursuit of meaningful growth and service now. For, as many have said before, if not now, when?

I have now heard many stories of our alums following interesting, bold, thoughtful, and caring paths. Repeatedly the beginnings of those journeys are attributed to their time at Vermont Commons, where they first learned through doing, and learned that they could, in fact, do. With similar sentiment, I wouldn't want my own children to have to wait until college to find themselves or learn what they can give the world. This is why I'm so grateful that Vermont Commons School exists. I can think of nothing better than to have the chance to join you and add my voice to our Commons.

Please don't hesitate to call or stop by. My office is open, and you will find yourself most welcome.

With warm regards,

Dexter
Dexter P. Mahaffey, Ph.D. Head of School

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 Heather Moore
 Tina Mueller
 Derrick Senior
 George Starbuck

Vermont Commons Alumni Entrepreneurs



Julia Lockett Cox '08
Skidmore, BS
Julia Lockett Photography
www.julialockett.com

I specialize in portraiture, drawing on the experiences of the subject to create the photograph. I strive to create beautiful images that reveal something personal.

VCS Impact:

VCS taught me the importance of giving back to communities. The most tangible way my work gives back is through Food 4 Farmers, a non-profit that focuses on chronic seasonal hunger. Documentary photography with Food 4 Farmers might not be the most profitable part of my work, but it is the most important.

Business Role Model:

Rick Peyser

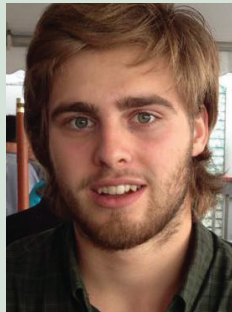
Authors, Speakers, Websites

On starting a business and creating art, "The Icarus Deception" by Seth Godin and Neil Gaiman's speech, "Make Good Art." On art, "Just Kids" by Patti Smith and "The Elegance of the Hedgehog" by Muriel Barbery.

Personal Hero:

Rick Peyser. I'm inspired by his patience, work ethic, and long term goals to enable coffee farmers to live more fulfilling lives.

PS. Julia is presently in Ethiopia photo documenting a disappearing tribe who has been displaced repeatedly by oil companies.



Josh Decatur '11
Edike
www.edikeayiti.com

Ediké is a casual luggage brand with a social mission. We manufacture high quality, waxed cotton and leather bags in the Cité-Soleil district of Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, where we pay our workers living wages and invest a percentage of profits in development initiatives.

VCS Impact:

My time at VCS connected me with the outside world and introduced me to people making a difference by taking action. More often than not the best role models were teachers and parents that took the lead to involve students in projects they were passionate about.

Business Role Model:

Shawn Carter

Authors, Speakers, Websites

"Four Steps to the Epiphany", Steve Blank; "The Four Agreements", Miguel Ruiz. Reach out to people around you who might have something to offer and start dialogues, ask questions. Not only will you learn a lot, but you'll also develop relationships that will generate long lasting benefits.

Personal Hero:

My parents.

PS. Josh has since left Ediké to pursue other adventures one of which may be extended travel in China.



Meika Hollender '05
NYU, BA, MBA
Sustain Condoms
www.sustaincondoms.com

Sustain is the first truly sustainable, Fair Trade certified brand of condoms marketed first and foremost to women. Sustain's mission is to celebrate, educate and support women by providing the products, knowledge and inspiration they need to proudly take control of their sexual health.

VCS Impact:

VCS kept me connected to the environment. It was that connection to the environment and environmental preservation that helped motivate me to create a business that completely disrupts the norm, reinventing the condom manufacturing supply chain to be as sustainable as possible.

Business Role Model:

My father, and business partner, Jeffrey Hollender

Authors, Speakers, Websites

Fast Company, Inc. and The New York Times. I love to listen to successful entrepreneurs, hear their story and how they have built their businesses – I follow most of them via Twitter and if they are in NYC, I make a point to go hear them speak.

Personal Hero:

My mother for so many reasons and Beyonce for inspiring women and girls to celebrate their femininity and for being the ultimate BOSS.

What's New at VCS?

Head of School

Dexter Mahaffey, our new Head of School celebrated 100 days at Vermont Commons School on December 4th! Give a call and congratulate him.

Instructors

Last year we welcomed: two teachers, Dr. Mark Keegan (Science) and Juan Manuel Garcia Urbina (Spanish); a new Learning Specialist, Sage Bagnato and our first ever School Counselor, Ari Shapiro-Miller. This year we are happy to welcome Hua Zhang as our new Chinese teacher.

Community Education Documentary Series

After the success of our first Documentary Series last year, we have expanded our committee

to include students and faculty and kicked off our first screening with "Disruption". A fantastic panel of local experts led an insightful discussion about the state of global warming and activism. In this vein, 6 VCS students, 7th -12th grade, attended the first Vermont Youth Climate Summit sponsored by Senator Bernie Sanders, I-Vermont and UVM.

Our next documentary will be "The Internet's Own Boy" about Aaron Schwarz, internet and information freedom activist. It will screen on January 28th at 6 pm.

VCS Finds a National Forum

Mark Cline Lucey and students Mitchell Leffler '14 and Nora Hill '15 presented at the National Association of Independent Schools national conference in

Florida on their work with Challenge 20/20.

International Program

We launched our International Studies Program with Ben Wang as Director and have welcomed our first international student, Ada (Zhen) Liu, from China!

Major Gifts Allow VCS to More Fully Live Its Mission!

Health and Wellness

A \$4,000 grant from the Kelsey Trust, in combination with a \$2,000 grant from the Hart Foundation, provided seed money for the first year of our in-school counselor position.

A \$50,000 grant from the Leonard and Mildred F. Ferguson Foundation was received to fund the new In-School Counselor position and our Health and Wellness Program

over the next two years. Ari Shapiro-Miller, working with Chance Cardamone-

Knewstubb and Marilyn Neagley, has designed a program meeting the needs of the different age groups of students.

Sustainability at VCS

We received an anonymous gift of \$25,000 to fund a new Sustainability program and allow us to hire math teacher and sustainability guru Bradley Materick as our Sustainability Coordinator!

Financial Aid

The Kelsey Trust has provided grant money both for Financial Aid and Research and Service. We are very appreciative of this local family trust for having trust in Vermont Commons!



Everyone Has a Role to Play; Everyone Has a Way to Give

Derrick and Deidre Senior return for an encore performance as Annual Fund Chairs for the 2014-15 Campaign!

A Message from Derrick and Deidre,

As last year's Annual Fund Chairs, we had two goals. First, to raise \$175,000... and we are happy to announce that goal was reached! Our second goal was 100% parent participation and we are especially proud that 99% of parents chose to participate in the 2013-14 Annual Fund! This was a first for VCS and we trust that this level of participation, along with 100% faculty and board participation, will continue to strengthen the "culture of giving" that makes our school so special. Family participation sends more than just dollars and cents to the Annual Fund, it gives our emerging culture of philanthropic giving a firmer foothold in the Vermont Commons legacy.

We are well on our way into another year of creativity, comraderie, laughter and generosity as our whole community comes together to support this incredible school. As we move forward we would like to take a moment to look back on last year's amazing campaign and thank the faculty, the board of trustees, alumni, families and local businesses that supported our many efforts from the very first message in the "Don't Give" video, to phone-a-thons, envelope stuffing, meetings, receptions, marketing and design, to the amazing GALA (now tradition). And then we would like to invite you to see this year's video at www.vermontcommons.org/giving/!

With deep thanks for last year and awesome anticipation for this year,

Deidre and Derrick Senior

Where Is the Class of 2014?

Isabella	Boston University, MA	Miles	Bates College, ME
Seth	Brandeis University, MA	Mitchell	Pepperdine University, CA
Ellis	Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, WI	Amber	University of Vermont, VT
Corbin	Champlain College, VT	Spencer	City Year in Philadelphia /University of Chicago, IL
Maggie	Eckerd College, FL	Aidan	Clark University, MA
Emil	Brandeis University, MA	Peter	Worcester Polytechnic Institute, MA



College Counseling

The Class of 2014 is now officially launched and are the newest members of the VCS Alumni Association. As a class, the twelve graduates received 1,275,000 dollars in merit based scholarships from the colleges and universities offering them admission (this was prior to receipt of their financial

aid awards). One member of the class was a recipient of National Merit Scholarship. Our current eight seniors in the Class of 2015 are busily applying to college and two were commended by the National Merit program and one was named a National Merit Semi Finalist.

VCS Students Rocking the Research

by Peter Goff



Nora Hill '15 started working with Dr. Jason Stockwell, Director of UVM's Rubenstein School (research arm of ECHO) last winter as part of an independent Research & Service class. Dr. Stockwell's research focuses on energy flow in aquatic systems, specifically among foraging fish and macro-invertebrates. Nora has been integrated into

his newest research program, focusing on Cisco (a trout relative in the Genus Coregonus). Cisco is unusual in that it spawns in the fall, so its eggs are available as a winter-forage for a large number of native fish. Without this high-value food, overwintering fish must turn to macroinvertebrates, a significantly lower-value food. Due to human influence, this important fish was removed from its native habitat in the Great Lakes. Nora has been working in two different labs with all levels of researchers as she has built the skills necessary to run her own experiment in support of Dr. Stockwell's larger research question.

Over the course of the last summer and this fall, Nora is designing, running, and analyzing her own experiments. Her plan is to turn this work into a VCS Naturalist Certificate, with the hope that it would be either incorporated into a larger publication by Dr. Stockwell's team or her own independent article in a peer-reviewed journal.



Eli Hulse '15 spent much of the summer of 2013 working in the research lab of Dr. Donna Rizzo (UVM, Environmental Engineering). Dr.

Rizzo specializes in the application of artificial intelligences to human problems. In particular, Dr. Rizzo's (<http://www.uvm.edu/~drizzo/>) work uses Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) in pattern-recognition problems (everything from subsurface groundwater contamination to water droplets on grape leaves to conductive patterns in human connective tissue). ANNs are capable of learning from experience, and are widely used for handwriting and speech-recognition applications. Eli worked with Dr. Rizzo, Dr. DeWoolkar, a graduate student, and an undergraduate student. He taught himself MatLab (a

high-end computer programming language that is widely used in the sciences), and worked closely with the team to develop novel ANNs designed to recognize visual patterns. This specific algorithm will be used as a pure research tool, and as a way to analyze ground-penetrating radar to find buried landmines. Eli's contribution to the work was so significant that he was listed as the second of the five authors on the resulting publication. Eli presented this work at the Governor's Institute of Vermont (Math Division), and hopes to continue this research in pursuit of a VCS Naturalist Certificate.

Class of 2014 Legacy Gift

The Class of 2014 broke new ground last year by starting a Legacy Scholarship Fund. They raised close to \$6,000.00! The intention is to grow this fund every year with donations from alumni, while donating \$1,000.00 each year to a NEW student who writes the best essay on "The Importance of Humor in Leadership". This topic is a fitting legacy for a class whose graduation performance was "I'm Not Crying" by Flight of the Conchords. Our first scholarship was awarded to a 7th grader.

The Sustainability Initiative at VCS

-Bradley Materick

The Mission and Guiding Principles of Vermont Commons School include language on the concept of environmental sustainability. Our Mission asserts that our students will “grasp the profound interdependence of the natural and human systems they inhabit,” and, “become ethical and engaged

ecological citizens.” Our Guiding Principles declare “understanding the relationships between humans and the world they share is the primary goal of education,” and that “students must interact directly with their environment in order to experience and appreciate the real-world value of their skills and knowledge.” Last year, we made substantial progress toward aligning our curricula and operations with these mission-derived concepts of

sustainability. Our efforts began with a fall Research and Service (R&S) class, Launching the VCS Sustainability Initiative. The students in this class became our school’s first Sustainability Committee and set the groundwork for a comprehensive, multi-year initiative focused on enhancing our school’s sustainability.

A spring semester R&S class focused on assessing and redesigning our school’s solid waste

management. Based on ten days of data, they estimated that VCS produces about 3 tons of solid waste/school year; 4,000 lbs as trash and 2,000 lbs as recycling. Further, students discovered nearly 7% is recyclable material, and 58% is compostable leaving us with the potential to reduce our trash production by up to 65%! Using this data, students designed a new system for waste management minimizing the trash we send to the landfill and

maximizing the materials we recycle, compost and donate.

The VCS Sustainability Initiative was secured last spring with the receipt of a \$25,000 donation and the appointment of Bradley Materick to be our first Sustainability Coordinator. Bradley is currently working to establish an expanded Sustainability Committee to include students, faculty, parents and trustees.



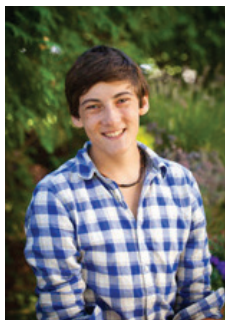
Vermont Commons School’s First International Student Hails from Shanghai

Ada Liu, our first international student, is settling in. “I feel I am part of a big family. The students and the teachers are very close to one another. In my previous schools, I could feel the distance between students and the teachers, but here the adults are more like friends. They really care about us and what we are feeling.”

Last year, Ada worked closely with Ben Wang, Director of International Programs from Shanghai and even skyped into Morning Meeting and introduced herself to the whole school at once. Now “I am living with the Mantegna family in So. Burlington and am looking forward to spending my first American Thanksgiving with them! I will return to

Shanghai over the Christmas holidays. This winter, I will try skiing for the first time—we do not get snow in China, so I cannot wait for that!”

Social Studies is Ada’s favorite class because of a new found interest in the US history. “My classmates share their opinions about different parts of their history, and the things I have learned are shaping my own values and opinions. Before I left Shanghai, so many people told me I would regret coming to the United States, that I would be bullied and made fun of, but I do not regret it for a second. Everyone has been so nice. I have made so many new friends, and attending a school with all American students has forced me out of my comfort zone. I chose Vermont Commons School to better understand American culture, and I have not regretted the choice I made.”



News from the Student Senate

-Jamie Benson, Student Senate President

This year the Senate, with fresh faces and bright ideas, has laid out several issues which we plan on tackling in our tenure. All of our senators, from the newest students in the community to the veterans, were on top of their roles from day one. After a rapid transition of leadership, we got right to work.

Our primary directives have been focused on Health and Wellness, student engagement, and technology policy reform. Working with the faculty and administration, we’ve begun to plan what VCS student involvement in policy-making will look like in the future. We want to see a cooperative process wherein

everyone gets a say as to the rules by which they are governed.

So far most of our work has been centered on the planning of events and dances, and the formation of, and student engagement in, various new committees, ie. the Health and Wellness and Technology committees. It’s our goal to help set into motion large policy changes that will be adaptable to changing technologies and student groups for years to come. This academic year we plan on putting many more of our ideas into action, and seeing where the 2014-2015 school year will take us!

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ENGAGING STUDENTS WITH
THE WORLD

Admissions

We've had a banner year in admissions at Vermont Commons, with a 16.4% increase in enrollment over last year. We hosted a very successful Open House in early November and a second one is scheduled for Sunday, February 8th at 11 a.m. Prospective families often share with us that they have heard about our school from current and alumni families.

We thank you for helping us to spread the word about our school.

Our Mission

Vermont Commons School students experience a unique blend of academics and global immersion, master fundamental academic disciplines, grasp the profound interdependence of the natural and human systems they inhabit, and graduate with the values, knowledge, skills, and commitment necessary to become ethical and engaged ecological citizens.

HEAD OF SCHOOL

Dexter Mahaffey
B.A., Middlebury College
M.A., Bread Loaf School of English
Ph.D., University of Louisville

DEAN OF STUDENTS

Chance Cardamone-Knewstub
Dean of Students
B.A., State University of New York at Binghamton
Masters of Public Health, Tulane University

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND POLICY

Jasmine Walker
B.S., Ithaca College

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Sarah Soule
B.A., Johnson State College
A.S., Marketing, Champlain College
A.A., Liberal Studies, Pine Manor College
Diploma, Upper Valley Teacher's Institute,
Lebanon, NH

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Mary Hamilton-Homer
B.A., Middlebury College
B.S.R.N., University of Vermont

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