

The Vermont Commons School Curriculum

Engaging Students with the World



Uniquely Integrated & Engaging

Dear Parents and Students,

As you read through this catalog, we hope you will enjoy learning more about our course offerings and our progressive approach to education. Vermont Commons School's academic program features an experiential curriculum for grades 6-12, utilizing hands-on 21st-century teaching methodologies, encouraging environmental engagement and responsibility and, in the latter grades, focusing deeply on preparation for further study and a productive, giving life.

We provide an integrated approach to Math, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies, and World Languages. Students write and read intensively, apply Science and Math principles interchangeably, understand Social Studies in the context of global history, and immerse themselves in World Languages through story and cultural study. You will note as you read on that our course offerings are taught in a non-traditional manner, integrating topics into multi-year studies rather than as separate and distinct courses. As a result of this curricular approach and our small class sizes--which allow for creativity and innovation--students graduate with the skills to succeed at college, but more importantly, they become creative, critical thinkers able to perceive, interpret, and engage the systems they encounter in the world.

While the curriculum at Vermont Commons School is designed to engage students fully, it could not be successful without our high-caliber faculty. The vast majority of our faculty members hold advanced degrees in their disciplines. They are most valued, however, for their ability to inspire students and to connect with them both in the classroom and on the trail. This course catalog reflects the passion, innovation, and expertise of Vermont Commons' faculty. We are pleased to share it with you.

Sincerely,

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

Jasmine Walker
Assistant Head of 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.

VERMONT COMMONS

ACADEMIC INFORMATION

Courses and Programs

The central purpose of all academic activities at Vermont Commons School is to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and experiences to understand the interconnection of their local and global ecosystems and communities, to recognize their own roles in these systems, and to formulate a personal investment in their natural and social worlds. The study of place affords the opportunity to discover and explore how one's environment, community, and actions are interconnected with the rest of the world. In order to accomplish this goal, each discipline provides students with the opportunity to develop the skills to describe, understand, analyze, communicate, and interact within their local and global communities. The course of study in Science, Art, Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Science, and World Languages allows students to form the base for observation, inquiry, analysis, creativity and communication.

Our field-based programs provide the opportunity to integrate academic skills with real-world experience. The Research & Service Program integrates analysis, research, and communication skills and develops service projects that make a lasting, positive impact on the local or global community and environment. Students learn about their community by having a positive impact on its members. The rigor of the Encounter Week Program comes from its ability to immerse each student in a longer, more intensive study based upon a strategically interwoven set of intellectual, cultural, interpersonal and physical challenges in an environment, like Research & Service, well beyond the confines of a traditional classroom's four walls.

Coursework Requirements

Vermont Commons School requires that students meet and exceed the Vermont state graduation requirements for study in Language Arts, Math, Science, History, World Languages, Art, and Physical Education by enrolling in courses in every discipline every year. VCS also requires that all students participate each year in a Research & Service class as well as three Encounter Weeks, the Wellness Program and Physical Education.

Advanced Academic Opportunities

While coursework at Vermont Commons School is generally rigorous and intensive, several opportunities exist for students whose needs go beyond that established curriculum. Contract Honors, an alternative to Advanced Placement courses, provides students with greater challenge, complexity, and coursework in grades 10-12. Teachers make the option to participate in Contract Honors available to students who meet the department's prerequisites, and students then "contract" for additional studies and earn an Honors designation for those courses on their transcripts. For students of rare motivation and academic drive, the school offers three Advanced Diploma Certification Programs: the Visual Arts Certificate of Concentration, the Global Citizen Certificate of Concentration, and the Naturalist Certificate of Concentration. Begun prior to senior year, these special diploma certificate programs involve working with a faculty advisor on an advanced, long-term research or creative project, as well as review by and engagement with the broader community. On occasion, and at times linked with one of the Advanced Diploma Certificate Programs, exceptional older students may additionally enroll in course work at one of the local colleges or universities.

Academic Support

Students who need to shore up academic skills, improve background knowledge, or struggle with their learning profile often seek tutoring. The Vermont Commons Learning Specialist coordinates professional tutors from the local community to work with students with learning differences. These optional services are based on private pay and fit into study halls or before and after-school schedules.

College Counseling Program

Vermont Commons School is committed to providing individualized college counseling to each student and family through a four-year program of information, test preparation, college visits, admissions guidance, and application support. Beginning in the junior year, each student works one-on-one with the Director of Counseling to evaluate his or her strengths, personal growth, and academic profile. With this guidance, students find colleges and universities that best match their academic, social, extracurricular, and geographic needs. The school utilizes Naviance and GuidedPath, online programs, to assist in the college search process.

Throughout the junior and senior years, the College Counseling Office keeps students and families informed of college admissions events. College admissions representatives regularly visit Vermont Commons, and students are encouraged to attend the information sessions. In addition, the Director of Counseling routinely visits campuses in order to promote Vermont Commons and gather information to share with families. A listing of colleges offering admission to our graduates can be found on the school's website.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS DEPARTMENT

The Language Arts curriculum at Vermont Commons School is integrated: students concurrently read literature, write creatively and analytically, and study grammar and the mechanics of writing. In addition to developing students' critical thinking and writing skills, our courses aim to improve their public speaking abilities.

The literature that students study is organized by themes that reflect and explore relationships between people and their environment. Students read canonical and contemporary texts from a variety of genres (novels, essays, plays, short stories, and poetry), and from a variety of cultures and perspectives. While reading a text, students write journal entries and analytical responses, as well as craft a creative piece of writing that is similar in genre or theme. Several times during the semester, students receive feedback from their peers and their teachers in a guided workshop format. In the spring semester, students share an excerpt from their work at the Evening of Student Readings. With the guidance of student editors, the LA department also publishes *Uncommon*, a literary magazine that showcases the students' best writing from throughout the year.

Interdisciplinary Humanities

6th Grade

Through exploration of maps and physical geography and the workings of local, state and national governments, students connect to human systems through project-based learning. Students learn how civics and geography impact and are impacted by people and the human experience globally, as well as where such experience is similar and different. In this interdisciplinary course, students work on creative and formal writing, critical thinking, and oral communication skills. Students' reading is choice-based as we explore a number of literary genres over the course of the year.

The Places We Come From

7th Grade

During 7th grade Language Arts, students consider how different environments can shape identity. They read novels where the young protagonists leave their homes, and discuss how the moves impact their personalities. When they read *The Outsiders*, they explore how participation in different groups can affect a character's choices, and in *Brown Girl Dreaming*, students question where one's home really is, especially when Jacqueline has lived in many places. When they read *Call of the Wild*, they examine how Buck is forever changed by leaving his safe home. In this class, students wonder, does the forest forever alter Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? In *Habibi*, Liyana navigates being from Palestine and from the US, and what this dual identity means. Does the island cause Jack to turn savage in *Lord of the Flies*? The dynamic relationship between people and their

environments is explored through class discussions, creative writing projects, and analytical responses. Finally, this course stresses a foundational understanding of the eight parts of speech, punctuation, sentence patterns, and the mechanics of paragraph building in order to develop the tools necessary to write clearly.

Finding Myself in the World

8th Grade

In this course, students investigate various characters' adolescent struggles as they confront their own inner journeys toward adulthood. Typical texts for this class include *The Giver*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Before We Were Free*, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. In addition, this class includes a unit on constructing an argument. After students learn the essential aspects of strong persuasive writing, they write and present their own argument to the class. Students also study poetry from around the world, learning about the use of poetic devices, and composing their own poems. Over the course of the year, students write analytical essays, arguments, poetry, short stories, and personal narratives. This class advances students' vocabularies, improves their writing capacities, and helps them think critically and creatively about values and beliefs, those of the characters they study, as well as their own.

Global Journeys

9th Grade

If travel encourages us to better understand our own homes and ourselves, then so does this travel-themed class. Drawing from a variety of genres, the course explores travels into nature, travels into the past, travels through our imaginations, as well as more traditional journeys into other cultures and lands. A primary goal of the class is to reflect upon the importance of learning through encounters with difference. Typical texts include *The Odyssey*, *The Penelopiad*, *Macbeth*, poems from around the world, *Persepolis*, and *Into the Wild*. Students craft analytical essays, a travel narrative, and their own short stories, and poetry. They also complete a research project on the journey of one of their immediate family members or ancestors. The course includes instruction in the basics of essay writing and MLA documentation, as well as a focus on vocabulary and grammar.

Changing Landscapes: Rhetorical Strategies and 19th-century British and American Literature

10th Grade

In this course, students read major works of 19th-century literature, focusing on British literature in the first semester and on American literature in the second. While reading poetry and novels, students practice writing in different rhetorical modes. They write about the literature analytically, comparatively, persuasively and descriptively. Typical texts for this class include *Jane Eyre*, *Hard Times*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Jungle*, and *Raisin in the Sun*. The course is designed to refine students' abilities to read actively as well as to write critically and creatively. Students in this class continue to develop their vocabulary, and refresh their knowledge of grammar and mechanics in preparation for standardized tests.

Critical Theory

11th Grade

Students practice applying different literary theories to classical and contemporary texts, as well as to popular media, such as films. One of the goals of this class is to understand that meaning, at least literary meaning, depends heavily upon the theoretical approach that is applied. Our textbook, *Critical Theory Today*, introduces students to the complex world of social and literary theory – a world that students will encounter repeatedly in their university studies. Theories covered include psychoanalysis, feminism, structuralism, Marxism, queer theory, postcolonial criticism, and African-American studies. Literary texts include *The Great Gatsby*, *The Things They Carried*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Beloved*, and *Twelfth Night*, as well as short stories and poems. Another goal of the class is to use theory to more fully understand ourselves, and the world around us. To this end, students are invited to apply theories to popular texts, television shows, advertisements, films, and song lyrics. In addition to several analytical writing assignments, students craft texts of their own, including short stories, poems, and personal essays. This course prepares students for the work they will do in their 12th grade Language Arts class,

Single Author Study.

Single Author Study

12th Grade Fall Semester

This course provides students with the opportunity for advanced study of a particular author's body of work. Building on knowledge of literary theory and analytical skills from last year's Critical Theory course, students select a critical approach that they use to interpret the texts of an author of their choice. Students write a 10- to 15-page, college-level paper that supports a clear thesis, uses secondary sources, and exhibits a thorough knowledge of their author's work. In addition to their analytical paper, students write creatively. In particular, they focus on a story that imitates their chosen author's style. At the end of this course students sit before a panel of faculty members and students to defend their papers in a presentation/discussion session that counts as their final grade.

The Memoir

12th Grade Spring Semester

In this course, students explore the genre of memoir. In addition to reading, listening, and responding in writing to texts by contemporary authors, students compose their own memoirs. Some of the authors read in the class are David Sedaris, Jeannette Walls, Frank McCourt, Dave Eggers, Richard Wright, Ishmael Beah, Asha Bandele, and Patti Smith. Students read their drafts aloud and receive feedback from peers. By the end of the course, students are familiar with literary devices and techniques particular to the genre of memoir. With the aid of peer and teacher feedback, students revise their writing to produce a final compilation of their memoirs.

MATHEMATICS DEPARTMENT

The Vermont Commons Math curriculum is designed to inspire curiosity in students by leading them to seek, explore, and communicate patterns in the world using mathematics. The integrated curriculum ties together the disciplines of mathematics: arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, statistics and calculus, exposing students to increasingly complex concepts and skills as they progress from class to class. As a result, students develop into creative, intuitive, skillful problem-solvers who are prepared to excel in college level math classes, as well as in fields such as science, engineering and technology.

Interdisciplinary Math & Science

6th Grade

The curriculum for math and science in sixth grade is designed so that the disciplines consistently overlap and support each other in skill development and content. Though they are taught as two separate courses, the topics are intensively linked. The science curriculum is broken into two parts: the first semester is dedicated to the physical science, primarily topics and chemistry and physics, and the second semester is focused on an introduction to ecology. Emphasis is on the development of laboratory and scientific thinking skills, field science skills and creative problem solving. The math curriculum covers a range of topics including ratios and proportions, statistics, algebraic functions and area and volume of geometric figures. The main goals of both courses are for students to develop a love of problem solving and to generate strong foundational skills with deep conceptual understanding.

Math 1: Pre-Algebra

This course provides an introduction to basic mathematics, algebra, geometry, and statistics & probability. The first semester begins with an exploration of ratios and proportional relationships highlighting their usefulness to solve problems. Next, students manipulate number operations with rational numbers where they create and use expressions and equations to represent and solve problems. Students are then introduced to scale modeling to solve two- and three-dimensional geometric problems. The year culminates with a study of graphical and written methods to interpret patterns in student-generated data to summarize central tendency and variability and an introduction to probability.

Math 2: Beginning Algebra & Scale Geometry

This course provides more foundational understanding for the branches of mathematics. Students begin the year with intensive work with direct linear relationships, scale modeling, unit conversions and geometric transformations. This leads to a linear models unit where students model data using the slope-intercept equation. More abstract traditional algebra begins next as we use linear equations to solve for an unknown variable, solve multi-step equations, and create models of situations using systems of equations. The year concludes with more advanced number operations including exponents, percent increase and decrease, scientific notation, square roots, and work with irrational numbers.

Math 3: Algebraic and Geometric Systems

This course starts by expanding upon linear models. In addition to reviewing topics from the previous course, students solve linear systems using multiple algebraic methods, solve linear inequalities, and perform regression analysis. Using linear inequalities, we identify a feasible region to make decisions in situations that involve constraints. Following this, we explore coordinate geometry and use the distance, midpoint, and slope formulas to identify polygons. An introduction to computer programming is included as students write a program to identify quadrilaterals. Next, students are introduced to trigonometry and right-triangle theory. This segues into a rigorous unit on inductive and deductive reasoning where there is further emphasis on using logical reasoning in proofs. Finally, the year ends by looping back to algebra with a unit on exponential models, including a final project using exponential regression to model data found in social science.

Math 4: Advanced Algebra and Plane Geometry

Advanced Algebra and Plane Geometry begins by exploring the differences between mathematical relations and functions and introduces a suite of commonly used parent functions. Particular emphasis is placed on exponential and logarithmic models. Algebraic and graphical methods for transforming these parent functions are covered in detail (translation, reflection, rotation, and dilation). The course also focuses on quadratic functions and their applications; students learn how to algebraically manipulate and solve quadratic equations (including equations with irrational, imaginary, and complex solutions). They also apply quadratic equations to understand such phenomena as projectile motion. This leads to a unit in plane geometry relating to circles and an introduction to conic sections.

Pre-Calculus

In the first semester, students explore function behavior, specifically polynomials of n th degree, radical, absolute value, piece-wise, and composite function. This is followed by units on exponential and logarithmic functions as well as rational functions. The second semester continues with units on Unit Circle trigonometry (sine, cosine, tangent, secant, cosecant, and cotangent) and the use of this knowledge as it applies to trigonometric proof and modeling. This final unit weaves components of all preceding content areas as students mathematically describe, predict, and communicate an object's position in space in multiple ways.

Calculus

Calculus focuses on the fundamental tenets of derivatives, limits, and integrals. Students explore rates of change and the area under a curve to apply these ideas to physical situations. Next, derivatives of cyclical situations with sinusoidal functions are examined to model periodic situations. Students grapple with many computational methods for both derivatives and integrals, including product rule, chain rule, quotient rule, and "u" substitution. The second semester focuses on the integrals and derivatives of exponential and logarithmic functions. In the final unit, students incorporate their knowledge of function behavior to sketch curves and find the volume of a solid generated by the revolution of the area between two curves.

Electives in Advanced Topics

Students who complete the typical coursework culminating in Calculus before senior year form an advanced

cohort that works with the department faculty in the preceding spring to select the subsequent year's course in an advanced topic. Some typical course options include Calculus II, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Math, and Linear Algebra; however, other courses may arise depending on the interest of the students and the availability of the appropriate faculty member. The cycle of advanced topics rotates each year so that students on a track needing two years of such coursework will not repeat a course while at Vermont Commons.

SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

The goal of the Vermont Commons School Science program is to produce Naturalists, scientists who understand the environment and their place within that system. The VCS science curriculum uses STEM principles and practices to help students understand the connections among Chemistry, Physics, and Biology. The guiding principles of the department are two-fold: to create naturalists who will be able to use the Scientific Method to identify the keystone questions within a particular system, answer them thoughtfully, and then act upon the new knowledge. Secondly, that naturalists graduate from VCS confident in their scientific literacy and ability to proactively apply technical knowledge and critical thinking in their roles as engaged citizens in their community.

Interdisciplinary Math & Science

6th Grade

The curriculum for math and science in sixth grade is designed so that the disciplines consistently overlap and support each other in skill development and content. Though they are taught as two separate courses, the topics are intensively linked. The science curriculum is broken into two parts: the first semester is dedicated to the physical science, primarily topics and chemistry and physics, and the second semester is focused on an introduction to ecology. Emphasis is on the development of laboratory and scientific thinking skills, field science skills and creative problem solving. The math curriculum covers a range of topics including ratios and proportions, statistics, algebraic functions and area and volume of geometric figures. The main goals of both courses are for students to develop a love of problem solving and to generate strong foundational skills with deep conceptual understanding.

The Living Vermont

7th Grade Semester Course

In this field-based class, students learn the basic principles and practices of ecological interpretation with specific focus on understanding native biodiversity and ecology. This course provides students with a firm foundation of local knowledge that will be drawn upon for the rest of their careers at VCS. The primary interpretive tool we use is a naturalist's field journal. Students are expected to recognize as many as 100 local animals and plants from sight/sound. The students' grades depend on their performance in their field journals; every organism we encounter will be recorded in this journal. Most classes are held in the field.

The Ecology of Vermont

7th Grade Semester Course

This course is devoted to the interactions between the biotic and abiotic landscape of Vermont. The class/lecture material is organized along historical lines, as the students trace the history of our landscape. The second half emphasizes the geological processes responsible for the current appearance of Vermont and the Champlain Valley. Field trips to local sites of ecological interest illustrate key concepts and reinforce field science skills.

Scientific Methods

8th Grade Semester Course

This course begins with an introduction to the Philosophy of Science. With a clear understanding of the goal of science, students dive into each step of the traditional scientific method individually. The VCS scientific method is recursive and based on a clear understanding of the service to be provided to the scientist's community. The

rest of the semester is spent applying the scientific method in multiple scientific disciplines. Points of emphasis will include: critical data-mining, collaborative skills, and communication.

Design Thinking

8th Grade Semester Course

This course exposes students to the engineering design process through a series of hands-on activities and design challenges. To develop solutions to these challenges, students will employ understanding of scientific concepts as well as artistic creativity. Projects are designed to require significant prototyping and testing, with emphasis on the value of “failure” during testing as an essential part of an effective design process. In certain challenges, student teams will be required to prioritize in response to limited resources, and make decisions in the face of uncertainty. In-class presentations will give students practice with justifying those decisions with empirical data and logical rationale. Students will also be exposed to the basics of electromechanical design and computer programming, using a microcontroller-driven platform. Over the course of the semester, students will work both individually as well as in project teams, enabling them to develop skills in both self-reliance and collaboration.

Chemistry I

9th Grade Semester Course

In this course, students examine key concepts in chemistry in the context of developing scientific thinking and lab skills. The class begins by studying the properties of matter at the macroscopic and atomic levels, including models of atoms. Students distinguish among physical, chemical, and nuclear changes in matter. Students become proficient users of the Periodic Table and use it to understand such concepts as isotopes, atomic number, electronegativity, and chemical bonding. Study of the evolution of atomic theory from the time of the ancient Greeks through the modern day illustrates the contribution of science in gradual improvement of human understanding of the natural world. The course culminates in the application of these foundational concepts to introductory study of chemical reactions. Laboratory activities throughout the semester develop students' scientific skills, including logical thinking and problem solving, experimental design and execution, data collection and analysis, and collaboration and communication skills.

Cell Biology & Anatomy

9th Grade Semester Course

The first quarter of this class focuses on cellular processes, especially with respect to protein synthesis, metabolism, and genetics. Building on the chemistry experience, students will learn the basics of organic chemistry while focusing on the processes of photosynthesis and cellular respiration. Group projects around emerging biotechnologies and forensics will be the primary basis of evaluation. The second quarter is devoted to comparative anatomy of animals. A systems-based approach will reveal the evolution of the animal body plan, always comparing other systems to mammalian organ systems. This is an intensive lab course, and most of the second quarter is spent dissecting multiple specimens. The primary text for this class is *Campbell's Biology*.

Physics I

10th Grade Semester Course

This course uses the study of motion to introduce students to the goal of physicists – to be able to explain the behavior of matter and energy in the precise language of mathematics. The course begins with study of kinematics, introducing students to vector and scalar quantities and using the kinematic equations to analyze motion in 1- and 2-dimensions. Newton's Three Laws of Motion are the foundation of a unit on dynamics, which also includes study of Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation as well as the effects of friction on the motion of objects. The course makes frequent use of demonstrations, short activities, and hypothesis-driven lab experiments to enable students to make hands-on connections to the concepts introduced in the course. In a term project, students apply their understanding to a subject of their choosing, in which they project analyzing the motion of objects using video analysis.

Evolution

10th Grade Semester Course

The class focuses on the history of evolutionary theory including the history of the belief system vs. scientific method debate to explain the origin and variation of life on Earth, pre-Darwinian theories (Lamarck, etc.), Darwin, and modern theories. During class, lab, and public presentations, students engage with the Evolution/Creation/Intelligent Design debate. Students appreciate the pros and cons of the various viewpoints, and learn how to respectfully engage others in this very hot topic. In the second half of the class, students study modes of selection, heritability, co-evolution, levels of selection, and altruism. Finally, students participate in an exercise called 'The Gibbon Genome Project,' that teaches them how humans have been using evolution (via artificial selection) for tens of thousands of years to domesticate animals and plants. During this section, students work to solve the riddle of the genetic language of a fictitious primate.

Chemistry II

11th Grade Semester Course

Picking up with where the 9th grade curriculum leaves off, this course leverages stronger math and science skills to more deeply understand the phenomena that drive chemical reactions. The course begins with familiar examples from Chemistry I to develop student skills in stoichiometry and other similar calculations that are essential to the modern application of chemistry. We then apply those skills to understanding acid-base reactions and chemical equilibrium, exploring their roles in everyday life. Building on student understanding of energy developed in Physics, we then undertake an extensive study of energy changes associated with chemical reactions and factors influencing the rate of reactions.

Physics II

11th Grade Semester Course

The transfer of energy is the unifying theme in this course. Building on the study of forces that concludes Physics I, this course begins with study of mechanical energy. We then move into the concepts of momentum and impulse, and their applications to understanding the transfer of energy between colliding objects. A significant portion of the semester is devoted to the study of electricity and magnetism, including simple electrical circuits and generation of electrical power. Students build and analyze simple circuits, and take apart common electrical devices to see how the underlying concepts are applied in everyday life. The principles explored over the semester are applied in a culminating team project to design and build a Rube Goldberg machine.

Electives

12th grade

In the **senior year**, students vote to select science electives. Some offerings include:

Elective: Animal Behavior

College-level readings and independent experimentation are large parts of this course and thus students' evaluations. We examine the neural basis for animal cognition, the evolutionary forces that shape how animals interact with their environments, and how behavior shapes our perceptions of those animals. The first quarter focuses on interspecific behaviors (behaviors expressed between different species, such as parasitism and predation). The lab portion of this class focuses on experimentation, and individual lab reports represent a significant proportion of the quarter grade. The second quarter focuses on intraspecific behaviors (interactions within members of the same species, such as mating systems and rituals, competition, and many different social systems). Particular emphasis is placed on local animals. At the end of the first semester, all students participate in a narrated demonstration of animal courtship rituals or predatory behaviors, and perform them for the VCS community. Throughout the semester, there are frequent readings taken from both historical and current books and periodicals.

Elective: Anatomy and Physiology

The workings of the human body are explored in this semester-long course. The course begins with review of the formalized language of anatomy, enabling clarity in describing position and orientation of anatomical structures. Students select three organ systems for study during the semester. For each system, students study levels of organization from the cell to organ level, essential biochemistry, physiology in healthy and diseased states, and the scientific rationale for common medical interventions. Student learning is driven by independent research in specific topics of interest, followed by presentation of findings in class discussions. Dissections of appropriate specimens are an integral part of the course for each studied organ system.

Elective: Zoology

College-level readings and independent experimentation are large parts of this course and thus students' evaluations. Students engage in a yearlong examination of the Kingdom Animalia. Using a phylogenic approach to understand the evolutionary history of our Kingdom, students spend more than a semester understanding the invertebrate members of Animalia. During the spring semester, students move to the human phylum, Chordata. Extensive work in the lab involves dissections of everything from Shrimp, Octopus, Water Snakes, and Pigeons to Rabbits.

Elective: Oceanography

This upper-level elective examines the world's oceans. Starting from a purely abiotic, physical aspect, students learn about marine geology and chemistry. From that foundation, they examine the incredible biodiversity within those ecosystems. Significant group work takes place during class debates of historical and modern conflicts regarding the many uses of oceans. A field trip to the coast helps students acquire firsthand experience of these systems.

Elective: Forensics

This is an exciting new entry into High School and college curricula. A truly multidisciplinary science that leverages students' logic and creativity, forensics is an intensively collaborative science. While learning modern, cutting-edge techniques (in our lab and during field trips to the Leahy Center for Digital Forensics and the VT State Forensics Lab) students gain an appreciation for what is possible (or not!) from a technical standpoint. Throughout the year, we will also examine/relive famous cases from criminal history (everything from Jack the Ripper to OJ Simpson) to understand forensic science's impacts on our lives.

Elective: Introduction to Neuroscience

This course focuses on the structure and function of the human nervous system, particularly the brain. Exploration will cover levels of function from macroscopic, specialized regions of the brain all the way down to the molecular biology behind signal transduction by individual nerve cells. Students will explore both the causes and consequences of neurological diseases in detail. The course will also explore how recent advances in non-invasive imaging technologies are rapidly expanding human understanding of brain function, to foster discussion about how neuroscience (and by extension, psychology) is applied in diverse (and often surprising) ways across modern society.

Elective: The Science of Water

Water is one of the most fascinating substances on the planet, and certainly the most important for life. This course will examine the chemistry of water, the movement of water around the planet, and global issues related to water quality and water resources. Laboratory and field investigations will be key elements of the course.

SOCIAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT

The mission of the Vermont Commons School Social Studies Department is to empower students to be effective citizens and change-makers in their communities and their world through the study of historical and current affairs. Sixth grade students are introduced to the concepts of local and global citizenship. Engagement with the

local community is paired in 7th grade with an experiential history of Vermont. The 8th through 10th grades take the long view of human history, always connecting the past to today. 11th and 12th grade students choose from elective courses.

Interdisciplinary Humanities

6th Grade

Through exploration of maps and physical geography and the workings of local, state and national governments, students connect to human systems through project-based learning. Students learn how civics and geography impact and are impacted by people and the human experience globally, as well as where such experience is similar and different. In this interdisciplinary course, students work on creative and formal writing, critical thinking, and oral communication skills. Students' reading is choice-based as we explore a number of literary genres over the course of the year.

Hands on the Land

7th Grade

This class explores the landscape, history, people and idea of Vermont through many lenses. Two-hour field trips during the weeks when the weather permits are central to this exploration. Some destinations include the Shelburne Museum where students see the progression from log cabin to clapboard house, and Shelburne Farms where they can take in the grandeur of the Gilded Age. We also collaborate with a class of students in Birmingham, Alabama for their perspective on Vermont and the world through a mock Supreme Court project. By June students are expected to be able to discuss how the past leads to the present in Vermont, and along the way develop skills in research, writing, presentations, literacy, analysis, comprehension, and collaboration.

Big History

8th grade

Big History explores 13.8 billion years of history—beginning at the Big Bang and ending in the future. Students trace this enormity of time through thresholds, or moments when complexity greatly increased. This course allows students to ask the big questions of life: Where did we come from? Why are we here? What makes us human? The year culminates in a Little Big History project in which students trace an object of their choosing through all of time and space.

The Classical & Medieval Worlds

9th grade

This course looks at the global maturing of human civilizations and the growth of human networks of exchange, from the Ancient Greeks to the Renaissance. This class takes a birds-eye view of history with a focus on patterns and systems of change, while challenging students to think critically and formulate investigative questions. Students each write a fully developed research paper on a historical topic of their choosing, followed by group video productions that communicate their research in a visual form.

Global Studies

10th grade

Global Studies is a thorough exploration of the period 1450-1914 as the first globalization, the blossoming of the modern world, and the complete reformation of human society due to the Industrial Revolution, but does so with an emphasis on how such a lens informs knowledge of United States history. Students complete numerous 2-3 page primary source assignments in which they contextualize that first-hand material within the time period being studied. In the 3rd and 4th quarters students write a 10-12 page research paper.

Electives

11th and 12th grades

During the Junior and Senior years, students enroll in mixed-grade yearlong electives on relevant topics based in

regional or historical themes that expand into broader-based analytical historical methodology and content. Students prioritize the courses and are enrolled accordingly. Some offerings include:

Elective: Modern United States History in a Global Context

The central and defining concept of this class is globalization. The post-1945 history of the US is inextricable from an understanding of 20th century globalization. Our goal is to explore the thrilling, mind-bogglingly complex, often contradictory, and generally disruptive nature of this process, and the ways it shapes—and is shaped by—the United States. This class is discussion and debate focused. Throughout the year we run a series of multi-position US foreign policy debates that will allow us to explore differing perspectives on the role of the United States in the great global unfolding. Students write short commentaries and opinion-pieces, and develop a culminating project that digs into and addresses a global issue of personal interest.

Elective: Perspectives on the Arab-Israeli Conflict

This elective course explores the intense conflict in present-day Israel/Palestine. Our focus, however, is not to search for the “real history” or “on single truth.” Instead, our objective is to see the conflict from many different perspectives in order to gain a deep understanding of its complexity. We use literature, film, music, and art as mediums to hear many different voices. Students do independent research on topics of interest and run class once/week. There is a culminating project that asks students to creatively narrate many voices from one place to show their nuanced understanding of the conflict.

Elective: Modern China

How did China become the power it is today? Where is it headed? What goes on in the heads of Chinese leaders? What about regular people? To begin to answer these questions, this class explores Chinese history in the last hundred years through films, texts, student-led discussions, papers, presentations and guest speakers. We start from the end of the last dynasty, then move through the Republic, war with Japan, the Civil War, the major campaigns under Mao Zedong, the reforms led by Deng Xiaoping, and China’s rise again to prominence on the global stage.

Elective: Current Issues

In this class for juniors and seniors interested in practicing their role as a citizen in a democracy, students learn the skills needed to discuss contemporary political issues. Students analyze current issues, such as healthcare, the national debt and education reform, and conduct problem-solving sessions to find common ground for action in shaping public policy. As a follow-up, students engage in a service-learning project to benefit the wider community. Activities include class discussions, research, and written and oral presentations.

Elective: Ecological Economics

This course provides an in-depth look at the growing field of Ecological Economics and the questions it raises about a profit-oriented economy, human happiness, food and production systems, and our consumption patterns. Professor Bill McKibben’s landmark book, *Deep Economy*, forms the curricular framework. Students write weekly responses and commentaries on the course topics and on events in the news. The class is a college-style discussion seminar where students learn to engage differing ideas in a scholarly way.

Elective: Ethics/Global Ethics

Ethics is that area of human inquiry which aims to determine the way(s) in which a person should live: What is moral? What is the good life? What are my obligations to other? And to myself? What does it mean to be a person? There are two global crises which are impacting people and countries across every continent: economic inequality and climate change. In this class we focus especially on competing solutions to these crises especially in terms of the roles of human rights, democracy, economics, and violence. We also look in detail at alternative forms of organizations in business, society and politics, from indigenous nations and worker owned businesses to peasant driven sustainable agriculture and finance dominated global cities to terrorism and war.

Elective: Sociology

This course explores human relationships in society, focusing on the use of a sociological perspective to examine

culture, social structure, the individual in society, social institutions, and social inequality. Our changing global society and its implications are presented and analyzed. Students learn to apply sociological theories and research techniques to modern-day problems. Students participate in a variety of activities including role-playing, discussions, field trips, problem-solving activities, simulation games, research, and class presentations.

Elective: Colonization in India

This course focuses on the Colonization of India and the Postcolonial aftermath as well as current/modern day issues. Using India as a case study, students will explore how our modern world has been shaped and reshaped. The course will look first at the culture of colonialism: How were the British able to create control over this subcontinent, or in many cases, a façade of control? What were the tools of empire, both physical and mental? What varieties of hybridity and synchronicity arose from this colonization? How did the melding of British and Indian culture give way to a new way of thinking about oneself and one's heritage? Finally, the course will explore modern issues of poverty, increasing population, women's right and environmental resources. Themes tie to specific locations (Delhi, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Pune, Madurai, Kolkata, Varanasi and Agra) through documented photojournalism and primary sources collected in each city.

Elective: Criminal Justice in the Age of Mass Incarceration

The US incarcerates more people than any other nation on earth but it wasn't always thus. Since 1980, the US prison population has quintupled. Why? Is this good policy? This class attempts to understand the complex dynamics behind this explosive rise and grapples with questions such as: What is the purpose of prison? Is it punishment? Rehabilitation? Public safety? Does prison meet any of these objectives? There is a significant focus on the idea of criminal justice policy as a barometer of fundamental social challenges: racial and economic inequality and the cultural attitudes towards marginalized communities. Along the way we look at and debate a host of issues including: the death penalty, mandatory minimums, drug laws, solitary confinement, incarcerated youth, and the power of the prison industrial complex. We hear from experts and people involved on all sides of these issues from victims of crime to convicted felons to prison officials and anti-prison activists. The course concludes with a focus on models from other countries and a discussion of possible alternatives for the US.

ARTS DEPARTMENT

Vermont Commons School offers both Visual and Performing Arts courses and experiences designed to inspire creative confidence and form a template for a meaningful, lifelong relationship with the Arts.

Students engage in direct studio experience with the Visual Arts curriculum. In this program, students develop a visual grammar through instruction that involves a variety of media and materials. Students explore perceptual and analytical drawing, traditional oil painting, mixed media, photography and printmaking. Original concepts that involve attentive creative thinking are the basis for every project. Sketchbooks are an integral part of coursework, serving as visual journals in which students reflect on their projects, practice observational drawing, and create new studies in the field for projects fashioned in the studio.

Through the Performing Arts curriculum students build confidence, empathy, collaboration skills and acting ability through improvisation and character development exercises, script analysis of rich texts past and present, and ensemble-building techniques. We celebrate the universality of theatre and honor both the uniqueness of individual voices and the generous spirit of collective creative endeavors

Arts Electives, Fall 2016

7th, 9th and 11th grades

Students in grades 7, 9 and 11 have their choice of four new mixed-grade-level visual and performing arts elective semester courses this fall. Grounded in the department's desire to create meaningful learning environments through the student-centered production of pieces meant to be shared with the community, students have the opportunity to build upon a talent or explore a new arts interest through this innovative, in-depth, three-hour a week course.

Middle School Theatre Arts

6th, 7th and 8th grades

Sixth, seventh and eighth graders are introduced to and engaged in the theatre arts throughout their middle school years at VCS. Each semester long course allows students to build confidence in performance and presentation and strengthen the necessary skills to work as a collaborative and supportive ensemble. Through improvisation games, monologue presentations, scene study, student-written pieces, and student-driven culminating performances, students experience the challenge, creative expression and joy of the theatre arts.

Play Production

All grade levels

We produce a full-length play annually; over the years this has included a variety of dramas, comedies, and musicals. Through the rehearsal, production and performance of each play, students strengthen their creative, social and intellectual confidence. In addition to performance, students often take on additional roles behind the scenes as coaches, designers, technical supporters, and stage managers. Recent productions have included *The Crucible*, *Our Town*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *West Side Story*.

Art Studio Welcome

6th Grade, Spring Semester

This course allows the artist to explore all the options and tools of the art studio. Students work on projects that involve observational drawing, painting and sculpture. On a weekly basis, artists have time to explore their own creative avenues during “free draw” sessions. Critiques in the classroom, creative consultations and a diverse selection of mediums to choose from provide for a wonderful foundation for future studio work.

Pop Art & Self

8th Grade, Spring Semester

This course revolves entirely around pop art and the self-portrait. Students begin this class with foundational exercises relating to the structure of the face and the dynamics of drawing and shading. Students continue experimenting in the studio with a series of expressive, technical, and conceptual prints that relate to their self-portrait in the style of Andy Warhol. Included in this course is a brief history of pop art and visits to galleries and museums. The culmination of all this studio work results in a colorful, digital print that students will always have in their portfolio.

Painting the Lotus

10th Grade, Spring Semester

This course prepares students to paint a convincing representation of the lotus using an experimental approach to art making. Students begin by studying foundational practices in drawing and painting the lotus from observation. The class incorporates these drawing studies and understanding of the flower in an attempt to create a viable and dynamic representation of the lotus. The result is a 4'x6' oil painting on canvas that explores the relationship between abstraction and realism

20th-century Conceptual Art

12th Grade, Spring Semester

This course explores contemporary themes in conceptual art. Slide shows, articles and discussions on artists that are working with ideas and materials that relate to our current social and artistic systems are the basis for learning. Studio projects involve assignments that relate to the ideas and materials that these artists are using. At the end of the semester, students have a better understanding of contemporary themes in art and have the ability to communicate these themes using a variety of mediums.

WORLD LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT

With the geographical connection to Latin American countries, as well as the growing number of Spanish speaking people in the United States, fluency in Spanish is essential for interaction within the Americas. And with China's economic, environmental, and political impact on the world on the rise, knowledge of Chinese language and culture is becoming increasingly important for anyone aspiring to be a global citizen. The mission of the World Languages Department, therefore, is to teach students to negotiate meaning across cultures as part of a foundation for responsible and capable global citizenship. The Department puts a strong emphasis on developing oral, written, and cultural proficiency through the study and use of authentic materials in context. Such exposure to language and culture advances students' abilities to appreciate different ways of thinking and living. By integrating cultural topics and current events in class, as well as structured and informal interactions with native speakers, we explore the world from the perspectives of Spanish and Chinese speakers.

Introduction to World Languages

6th Grade

In this yearlong course, one semester is dedicated to Chinese and one to Spanish. The goal of this course is to give students a taste of both languages and cultures and enable them to make an informed decision about which language they will pursue. During both semesters, students carry out numerous activities that expose them to Spanish and Chinese language and culture. Students learn a starter vocabulary from both languages. They listen to music, watch films, play games, and cook foods from Spanish speaking countries and from China. This class prepares students for success in their higher-level World Language classes.

Spanish I

In Spanish I students are exposed to the Spanish language by listening to and creating stories in the target language. Grammar structures introduced are subject and possessive pronouns, definite and indefinite articles and verbs in the present tense as well as basic paragraph connectors. Students read short novels with high frequency words to solidify acquisition and expand vocabulary. Active student participation is required to strengthen oral skills. Cultural pieces are woven into the lessons with a culminating project at the end of each unit. Class is conducted mainly in Spanish.

Spanish II

In Spanish II students gain confidence in the language via stories and games. Students develop more complex stories, this time in the past tense. Students read longer novels on a variety of subjects, from folktales to travel to mystery novels to every day accounts. Spontaneous dialogues are encouraged and class discussion is rich. Moreover, students have an opportunity to explore different cultural topics of their choice as indicated by the instructor. Class is conducted fully in Spanish.

Spanish III

This class is taught entirely in Spanish and moves quickly through several new verb structures such as the future, the conditional, all the progressive and perfect tenses, and the commands. There is a significant amount of vocabulary covering a wide set of topics such as housing, work, health, politics, and the arts. The storytelling recedes and gives space for more frequent class discussions and questions about student's experiences. This class has a special focus on historical and contemporary trends in Latin America as well as an emphasis on the cultural diversity of the region. Students read simplified versions of original Spanish books as well as graphic novels in the Spanish language.

Spanish IV

Spanish IV is an advanced study of the language with a topic-centered curriculum revolving around cultural themes. At this level, students are expected to have knowledge of all the tenses in the indicative mood so that they can now focus on the subjunctive mood. A great emphasis is put on oral fluency as well as on vocabulary

development accomplished by participation in improvisational exercises, debates, and conversations with native speakers through social networks. An essential part of this class is to familiarize students with various cultural aspects of Spanish-speaking countries utilizing music, film, unabridged readings, and the media. Activities include making a movie based on their own script, carrying out Hispanic traditions and celebrations, dancing, and other hands-on projects.

Spanish V

Spanish V is an advanced study of contemporary socio-political, cultural, and environmental topics taught using primary sources with an emphasis on literature. Spanish V assumes competency in all tenses as well as a wide range of vocabulary. The class activities include a literary analysis of Latin American masterworks, debates of hot-button topics, and listening to primary sources. Speaking and writing fully in Spanish is expected. In this class students participate in a debate about a specific social issue, act out a play in Spanish, recite a Spanish poem, and write a paper about a Latin American leader.

Chinese I

Students in this course are immediately immersed in the spoken language through the use of stories. Teachers and students work together to create stories that are made comprehensible and compelling by using strong plots, props, and student actors. Students acquire a solid foundation in the oral and written language through repeated exposure to high-frequency vocabulary and grammatical structures. Chinese characters are introduced immediately, and students learn to read and type. Students narrate stories, describe people and settings, and express their opinions. In addition, aspects of Chinese culture are discussed throughout the course. A variety of games are also used to support students' learning. Students finish the year by reading their first graded Chinese novella.

Chinese II

In Chinese II students expand their vocabulary and acquire more complex grammatical structures. Stories continue to be an important vehicle for students to improve their abilities to describe, narrate, compare, and explain. More Chinese cultural elements are introduced, and students work with more authentic written and audio materials. Students are able to produce more written and spoken work and read several novellas appropriate for this level.

Chinese III

Students in this course transition to an intermediate level of proficiency. In addition to stories that are written to facilitate language acquisition, authentic materials are introduced in the form of music videos, movie trailers, and soap operas providing opportunities for discussions about Chinese culture and worldview. Sentence structure becomes more complex to allow students to describe their daily lives in more detail. Students read several level-appropriate novellas through the year.

Chinese IV

This intermediate-level course uses pictures, news stories, videos, and blogs in addition to stories to allow discussion of different topics. Comparisons are made between Chinese and American culture. The volume of reading continues to increase significantly as students engage in extensive reading to facilitate rapid vocabulary acquisition in a wide variety of areas. Skits and student presentations provide opportunities for students to practice presentational language, while e-mail exchanges with native Chinese speakers allow students to practice interpersonal and intercultural exchange. Authentic materials continue to be supplemented by graded novellas appropriate to this level.

Chinese V

Students transition to an advanced level of proficiency in this course. Authentic materials predominate in the

form of movies, podcasts, news articles, fictional stories, comics, and other media that showcase cultural issues and facilitate discussion. Students continue to expand vocabulary as they increase their fluency in the use of grammatical structures. Extensive reading continues, and students produce presentations and skits and write e-mails, stories, and essays.

RESEARCH AND SERVICE DEPARTMENT

The Vermont Commons School Research and Service Program takes students beyond the traditional disciplines and classroom walls, connecting academics with hands-on community engagement in a learning experience that inspires students to take an active role in improving their communities. Research and Service classes are multi-age (with the exception of 6th Grade) and multidisciplinary, and each year, every Vermont Commons student in grades 6-11 enrolls in a semester-long Research & Service class, with every effort made to place students in a class of their choosing. Each class is focused on a specific theme integrating science, technology, art, and the humanities and founded on a service relationship with one or more community partners. Together, the faculty, students and community partners develop a hands-on project that requires students to perform in-depth research on the theme of the class and provide meaningful service to the community partners.

Past and current Research and Service offerings include:

Faces From Around the World

Throughout this course we expand our definition of the word “refugee.” The members of the class become involved with the Vermont refugee community, and learn about what it means to be a refugee through storytelling. Students meet and form bonds with people from across the globe who have made the daring, sometimes dangerous, journey to Vermont. Through a series of activities and interactions with Vermont refugees, films, podcasts, articles/stories, and speakers, students learn about what the word “refugee” means to different people. Several guest speakers teach us how to capture and retell a story without losing the original storyteller’s voice. Over the course of the semester, we relay several stories of refugees’ journeys to Vermont, and photograph faces from around the world. The class culminates in a photography exhibit, the proceeds of which support the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program. Each refugee’s portrait (black and white photography) is accompanied by their story and put on display to raise awareness for Vermont refugees.

Food for All!

Most of us at VCS take it for granted that we have access to all the delicious, healthy food we want and need. But what about all the Vermonters who don’t? This class is about FOOD! We dive into the world of food accessibility by digging our hands in the dirt, working with local organizations to make healthy food available to more Vermonters, and even visiting our legislators in Montpelier to let them know how important this issue is. Along the way we may do some cooking and tasting of food ourselves. If you love to eat good food and believe that every Vermonter deserves that same opportunity, then this is the class for you!

All the World’s a Stage

There is no pre-determined community issue or service project for this class, because students collectively decide on the focus! Using this student-identified community need, the group researches the issue, connects with organizations with a similar focus, and explore various theatrical forms/techniques that could be used to bring awareness to the issue. The service component is a student-written and performed theatre piece offered to both the VCS community and audiences outside the school.

Animal and Human Interactions

Work with the Humane Society, Shelburne Farms, All Breed Rescue and various other local community partners to learn more about relationships that humans forge with animals. We work to create a lasting project with the humane society and also spend time cuddling up cute cats in the lobby. We muck stalls, feed chickens and also see what it’s like to make eye contact with an alpaca. We walk dogs that might otherwise be stuck in a small crate hour after hour. The

research aspect of our study questions the relationships we forge with different types of animals –why do we love some, hate some and eat some?

Extinctus

In this Research and Service class student learn about and implement animal conservation projects. Our projects explore a vast array of systems from studying efforts that support the preservations of elephants in Africa to examining local conservations systems at fish hatcheries and bird sanctuaries. We also re-launch “Extinctus,” a project where students attend classes at Burlington City Arts to silkscreen animal images on canvas shopping bags that are then sold to local grocery stores. It is our hope that at the end of this class students will be inspired to help species and ecosystems survive on this wonderful living planet.

Learning and Teaching with New Americans

In this class we embody the notion that we all have something to teach and that we all have something learn from every individual that we encounter. In this class we meet regularly with a group of New American adults who hail mostly from Nepal and Somalia. We help them to practice and learn English and help them prepare to take the U.S. citizenship exam. We also learn from them about their lives, culture, and experience as refugees and New Americans. Along the way we train ourselves to be effective ELL instructors, learn about the U.S. system of taking in refuges, and take a look at some of the geopolitical factors causing people to decide to seek refugee status.

Persistence of Memory

This class focuses on art and its relation to identity and memory. Our service is based at the Residences at Shelburne Bay, working with residents with Alzheimer’s disease. Our research is from the studio—generating lessons to share with the individuals that we are working with. Students need to be prepared to visit an Alzheimer’s care facility each week. Our main objectives are for students to learn about a variety of different artistic mediums; learn how to conduct research in art; and for students to learn how to share this creativity and knowledge with other individuals, thus creating meaningful relationships. This semester we also have approval to make a large mural above the swimming pool at the Residences.

Mapping and Managing Invasive Plants

Did you know there are foreign invaders lurking everywhere on the Vermont Commons campus? Fortunately, these invaders are plants and therefore do not pose much of a threat to us directly. However, these plants (called “non-native invasives”) can pose a serious threat to the Vermont landscape and in wild habitats. In this Research and Service class, you will identify and research several species of invasive plants—both on our own campus and at the UVM Horticultural Farm right next door—in order to understand how they can negatively impact the natural communities they invade, and how we can help to prevent their continued spread across the landscape. Using GIS (Graphic Information Systems), we work as a group to create a detailed landscape map of our campus in order to locate the invasive plants and determine which ones can be feasibly removed. We then get our hands dirty by actually removing invasives from our campus and from targeted areas of the Horticultural Farm. In addition, we work on creating interpretive materials for a “woodlands walk” on the Horticultural Farm property. Overall, you will spend a semester performing important ecological service for our school, the Horticultural Farm, and the larger Vermont landscape.

We Love Kids & Wildlife!

In this Research and Service class, we partner with sixth and seventh grade students from The Schoolhouse to work on projects to promote wildlife in the pond area next to their grounds. We mentor these younger students in the construction of these structures as well as interact with them through presentations and whole group discussions. We spend most of our time between Bread and Butter Farm (where the workshop is located) and The Schoolhouse grounds.

ENCOUNTER WEEK PROGRAM

The Encounter Week program provides some of the most innovative and memorable experiences for Vermont Commons School students. For a week each in September, January, and May, regular academic classes do not meet and instead students form multi-age groups and, along with the entire faculty, embark on a variety of “encounters.” From studying tidal pool ecology in Acadia National Park or exploring art museums and artists in New York City to backpacking through the Adirondacks, Encounter Weeks engage students with new ideas, people, and challenges, as well as develop the qualities and skills needed to work together as a group. At the beginning of the year, 6th and 9th grade students go on their own, unique trips: 6th graders start to build community and understand their place in the broader community and the 9th-grade class circumnavigates Lake Champlain by bicycle. Later in their Vermont Commons career, older students have the opportunity to take a wilderness leadership training Encounter Week and subsequently act as student leaders for future trips.

Students engage in these challenging but rewarding journeys as fully as they do any other aspect of school. And to that end, teachers write evaluative comments for each student and assess them with a score of 1-5, based on the student’s participation, journal writing, initiative, group cooperation, decorum, and responsibility.

Past and current Encounter Week offerings include:

Acadia National Park

Students leave for Down East Maine on Monday, ending the day by setting up camp, sitting on a cliff above the Atlantic, and watching the Milky Way above the lighthouses. On Tuesday, students climb the Beehive, using iron rungs imbedded in the granite wall since the days of the Rockefellers. Taking the traditional plunge in the waters of Sand Beach, students spend the remainder of the afternoon exploring the tide-pools, looking for feeding barnacles, porpoises, and puffins. On Wednesday morning students enter the submerged (at high tide) anemone cave to search for brittle stars, purple anemone, and green crabs. Then the entire group climbs aboard the Lobster boat, *Miss Samantha*, to see first-hand how the lobster fishery in Maine is sustained, as well as visit puffin and eider-duck sites, and the famous harbor seal nursery. Thursday includes a day of service with the National Park Service and the Friends of Acadia, followed by a hike up Bubble Rock; the day ends with a lobster bash in Bar Harbor. Friday morning, students wake up and break camp in the wee hours before dawn and drive up Cadillac Mountain to be the first people in the continental U.S. to see the sunrise.

Outdoor Leadership Course and Wilderness First Aid

This course prepares students for working in wilderness leadership positions and allows students to co-lead future VCS wilderness Encounter Weeks. Over the course of the week, students develop their own leadership styles through discussion and hands-on activities in the field. Students begin with two full days at Vermont Commons School learning techniques in backcountry medical care from a Wilderness First Aid (WFA) instructor from SOLO, a national leader in wilderness medicine. Upon the successful completion of the course, they are certified in Wilderness First Aid. They then embark on a four-day backpacking trip in New Hampshire’s White Mountains, where they focus on the leadership-training portion of the trip.

Winter Writing Retreat

In this Encounter Week, students devote five days to the writing craft, completing exercises in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. In addition to writing, students spend time snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and sledding on the land surrounding the cabin in which they are staying. Indoor activities, beyond reading other students’ work and writing their own, include playing games and cooking meals together. Participants on this Encounter Week expand their minds by responding to creative writing prompts, giving feedback on each other’s work, and reading texts by published writers for guidance and inspiration.

Art Road Trip

Vermont Commons students embark on a trip to New York City to visit the best museums in the world— including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the MoMA, the Frick, and the Whitney—walk countless fashion and bohemian avenues, and taste a variety of ethnic and local cuisines. Other activities include watching an international movie

at the Film Forum, eating cannoli, taking photographs at the Ferrara Bakery in Little Italy, and walking across the Brooklyn Bridge at sunset to Grimaldi's Pizzeria. Students should be prepared to see a lot of spectacular art, to eat plenty of epicurean delights, and to return to Vermont with a new appreciation for the art center of the world.

Big Trips

Each year Vermont Commons School designs trips to far-off destinations that require student fundraising and additional fees. In the past students have traveled to Peru, Belize, China, Great Britain, Italy, and domestic locations, such as the Sundance Film Festival Utah and Yellowstone National Park. These trips coincide with the weeks designated for the Encounter Week Program. Students fill out applications during the spring and begin fundraising the following school year. Trips offered in 2016-17 include whitewater canoeing in Maine, ecological and cultural study in Belize, an exploration of Abrahamic religions in New York City, cultural exchange with a sister school in China and archeological and astronomical study at Crow Canyon in Colorado.

SENIOR INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

As a capstone to the community-based education of our Research & Service Program, seniors engage during their fall semester in internships with local businesses, organizations, and professionals working in a broad array of fields, allowing each of our students to pursue one of his or her passions in a deep, meaningful, and challenging way over a semester-long period of time. The Internships are intended also to enable the student to do work that both contributes to society and allows them to develop personally and uniquely. After a three-week course orienting seniors to the expectations and habits of the professional world (including skills such as interviewing, resume writing, and job etiquette), students intern for three school-hours per week throughout the first semester. The Program Director both assists students in establishing these internships prior to the start of the school year and visits and oversees the ongoing internships over the course of the semester to assure their quality, as well as the accountability of the student. Juniors participate in a workshop in April, during which they examine their interests and life goals and scrutinize how these might lead to the internships they will pursue.

SENIOR PROJECT PROGRAM

The Vermont Commons School experience culminates with a Senior Project. At the end of their spring semester, seniors spend five weeks on their Senior Projects in lieu of attending regular classes. Individual projects are designed and implemented by seniors under the guidance of a faculty project advisor. The senior project gives students the opportunity to explore a field of interest, to pursue a possible career or attain a skill, and to gain a sense of the professional world outside the classroom.

The goals of this program are to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, to provide seniors with time to reflect on their experiences at the Vermont Commons School, and to pursue intensive study on a topic of their choosing. The Senior Projects mark a transition point for the seniors; the program allows them to creatively tie together their personal interests and academic experiences as they make the transition from high school to future pursuits.

WELLNESS

Study Skills and Wellness

6th grade

In the first semester, a study skills course is taught by the Middle School Director and the 6th grade team. In the second semester, the wellness course includes social and emotional learning, health, conflict resolution, and other developmentally appropriate topics.

Health, Wellness & Life Skills

7-8th grades

This course takes place for one hour weekly for the several weeks of each quarter. After three weekly classes each quarter, this period converts to a monitored study hall. In addition to these content-driven sessions there is time for students to meet in small groups or one-on-one with the Dean of Students, Director of Middle School or the School Counselor to ask questions or to discuss topics in further detail. There is an opportunity for students to ask questions during the information sessions, but for lengthier discussions we have reserved this extra, optional time. During class, students will be given information on the following topic areas: Plagiarism, Study Skills, Time Management, Conflict Resolution, Anxiety, Exercise, Healthy Body Image, Drugs and Alcohol, Puberty, Healthy Relationships, Gender vs. Sexuality, Nutrition, Sleep and Happiness.

High School Health and Wellness

The goals of the Health and Wellness program are:

- 1.) To provide helpful information and resources to students.
- 2.) To provide a safe space for student to share perspectives and questions with peers and facilitators.
- 3.) To encourage ongoing discussions of important health and wellness topics among members of the community both at school and at home.

Broad topics include: sex education, mental health, drugs/alcohol, and nutrition.

9th grade

Discussions revolve around consent and respectful relationships, understanding stress and depression, and basic information about drug abuse and misuse.

10th grade

The focus this year is on contraception and STDS, manifestation of anxiety and coping strategies and nutrition/food decisions.

11th grade

The topics include gender and sexual identities, impacts of pornography, the science of happiness and the challenges of addiction.

12th grade

Students provide some direction in this year, though we will include conversations on enthusiastic consent and continue discussions on managing stress and anxiety.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

All students take P.E. twice a week, on Monday and Friday. P.E. offers a unique opportunity to learn about lifelong fitness and to engage informally with the faculty outside of the classroom. Each student chooses from a list of options. Current and past choices include running at Shelburne Farms, Capture the Flag, strength training, and lawn volleyball. All of our extracurricular athletics also meet during PE time. If a student is involved in an adult-supervised sports team within his or her community, he or she may be eligible for a P.E. waiver.

EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS

The primary goal of the VCS athletic program is to foster sportsmanship, leadership, and personal growth. Student-athletes learn to balance academic responsibility with responsibility to their teammates. The team experience is open to any academically eligible VCS student. While the objective of any competition is to win, this is secondary to the primary goal of the VCS athletic program. Vermont Commons School currently fields inter-scholastic teams in the following sports: Volleyball (boys, girls, and co-ed); Cross-country (co-ed); Basketball (boys); and Ultimate Frisbee (co-ed).

FACULTY AND STAFF

Katherine Bailey

Administrative Assistant, Assistant to the Head of School, Appointed 2014
Bennington College, B.A.

Christie Beveridge
Chair, Language Arts Department, Appointed 2010
Colby College, B.A., Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College, M.A.

Jenna Bisset
Learning Specialist, Appointed 2015
University of Vermont, B.A., University of Vermont, M. Ed.

Linda Bursell
Business Manager, Appointed 2010
Champlain College, A.S., University of Vermont, B.S.

Chance Cardamone-Knewstubb
Dean of Students, Spanish Instructor, Appointed 2003
SUNY Binghamton, B.A., Tulane University, M.A.

Mark Cline Lucey
Chair, Social Studies Department, Director of Research and Service, Director of Senior Projects, Appointed 2004
Connecticut College, B.A., Brooklyn College, M.A.

Jennifer Cohen
Language Arts Instructor, College Counseling Team, ELL Tutor, Appointed 2004
University of Notre Dame, B.A., Harvard University, M.T.S., University of Washington, M.A.T.E.S.L.

Adriana Comtois
Chair, World Languages Department, Appointed 2004
Universidad Ricardo Palma, B.A., Saint Michael's College, M.A.

Peter Goff
Chair, Science Department, Volleyball Coach, Appointed 1997
Hobart College, B.S., University of Vermont, M.S.

Diana Guyer
Math Instructor, Appointed 2016
Comenius University, M.S.T.

Mary Hamilton
Director of Advancement and Strategic Growth, Appointed 2013
Middlebury College, B.A., University of Vermont, B.S.R.N.

Guinness Harley
Music Instructor, Appointed 2015
University of Edinburgh, B.A., University of Edinburgh, M.A.

Jory Hearst
Language Arts Instructor, Social Studies Instructor, 6th-grade Program Co-leader, Appointed 2015
University of Michigan, B.A., University of Michigan, M.A., Simmons College, M.A.

Mark Keegan
Science Instructor, Appointed 2013
Northeastern University, B.S., Cornell University, Ph.D.

Steve Lausier
Registrar, IT Director, Website Manager, Appointed 2013
University of Massachusetts Lowell, B.A., University of Vermont, M.A.

Dexter Mahaffey
Head of School, Appointed 2014
Middlebury College, B.A, Bread Loaf School of English, M.A., University of Louisville, Ph.D.

Kris Mohlman
Science Instructor, Mathematics Instructor, 6th-grade Program Co-leader, Basketball Coach, Appointed 2015
Bowdoin College, B.A.

Heather Moore
Director of Middle School, Social Studies Instructor, Appointed 2010
Skidmore College, B.A., University of Vermont, M.A.

Ben Patrick
Chair, Arts Department, Research and Service Instructor, Appointed 2004
Saint Michael's College, B.A., Pratt Institute, M.S.

Jessica Redmond
Chair, Mathematics Department, Appointed 2006
Cornell University, B.S.

Ari Shapiro-Miller
Director of Counseling, Athletics Director, Appointed 2013
University of Massachusetts Amherst, B.S. Saint Michael's College, M.A.

Jill Strawbridge
Director of Admissions, Appointed 2013
University of South Alabama, B.A.

Jasmine Walker
Assistant Head of School, Math Instructor, Appointed 2008
Ithaca College, B.A.

Ben Wang
Chinese and Social Studies Instructor, Encounter Week Director, Appointed 2010
Stanford University, B.A., University of Vermont, M.S.

Heather Win
Play Director, Performing Arts Instructor, Director of Senior Internship Program, R&S Instructor, Appointed 2014
California State University-Fullerton, B.A., CUNY-Bernard M, Baruch College, M.P.A.

Hua Zhang
Chinese Instructor, Appointed 2014
University of Science and Technology of China, B.S., University of Pittsburgh, M.S.

Vermont Commons School admits qualified students irrespective of race, color, religion, gender and sexual identity, national origin, or disability. All students are afforded the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to our students. The school does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender and sexual identity, national origin, or disability in the administration of its educational programs, admission, scholarships and loans, athletics, or other school policies.