Vermont Commons School Curriculum

Scholarship. Community. Global Responsibility.

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students,

This catalog of course offerings is a tour of our progressive approach to education. Vermont Commons School's curriculum utilizes collaborative, hands-on, 21st-century teaching methodologies to develop and inspire a deeply intrinsic commitment to intellectualism, which along with skills and grit lead to a successful and complete college education followed by a life of service locally and globally.

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, cultural study, and international exchange. Course offerings integrate 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 creative and critical thinkers, able to perceive, interpret, and engage the systems they encounter in the world.

The vast majority of our faculty members hold advanced or terminal degrees in their disciplines, along with years--or decades--of work in experiential education. 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 their passion, innovation, and expertise. We are pleased to share it with you!

Sincerely,

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

Jasmine Walker
Assistant Head of School

VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

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, English, 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 English, Math, Science, History, World Languages, Art, and Physical Education by enrolling in courses in every discipline every year. Students who have accelerated in Math by successfully completing Calculus 1 by the end of Junior year (or earlier) are not required to be enrolled for credit in a math course thereafter in order to graduate. Students who have accelerated in World Language by successfully completing either Spanish V or Chinese V by the end of Junior year (or earlier) are not required to be enrolled for credit in a World Language course thereafter in order to graduate. 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

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

The English 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 English department also publishes Uncommon, a literary magazine that showcases the students' best writing from throughout the year.

Interdisciplinary Humanities

6th Grade

6th Grade Humanities examines who we are as Vermonters, and is an introductory civics course at heart as we look closely at the workings of government through place-based and project-based learning. We'll study the landscape, history, people and idea of Vermont, from its first inhabitants to its current population. We'll examine and debate a current state bill and then watch the legislature in-session and dig into an issue impacting our local government and politics. In this interdisciplinary course, students work on creative and formal writing, critical thinking, and oral communication skills, as tools to communicate their thoughts as citizens. There is a daily practice of grammar/usage/mechanics, and 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 English, 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

This course is a combination of a literature class and a rhetoric class. We study a variety of texts to examine the strategies authors use to make meaning. Students read closely, identifying the tools of a

writer; they analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate fiction (poetry, drama, novels) as well as nonfiction (a variety of essays). This course teaches students to appreciate great writing, and to develop evidence based essays and arguments of their own.

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 & Changing Identities

12th Grade Fall Semester

Single Author Study is designed to teach students to write a college-level analytical paper on an author's body of work. During the course, students work through the process of creating an advanced study of their chosen author's novels by building on what they learned in their Critical Theory class. By the end of this course, students are familiar with the process of reading for the purpose of analysis, conducting research, using an annotated bibliography, and producing an academic article. In addition, students write an author imitation, and become expert editors. Changing Identities focuses on the identities of specific authors and their characters. We investigate what our name, our families, and our cultures contribute to our senses of self. We take a close look at Kafka and the existentialists, Jhumpa Lahiri and her novel, *The Namesake,* Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat," and Suzan-Lori Parks' play *Topdog/Underdog.*

The Memoir

12th Grade Spring Semester

Postmodern Memoir explores the genre of memoir. We read, listen to, and study memoirs from a variety of authors including David Sedaris, Dave Eggers, Jeanette Walls, Frank McCourt, and Richard Wright. Students compose their own memoirs using some of the techniques they learn from the professionals. They experiment with different purposes, tones, moods, points of view,

and formats. Each senior completes a final booklet that includes a creative cover, a table of contents, an introduction, and 15 edited 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 in 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 ecological sciences. Much of the first semester curriculum is adapted from a program called Foundational Approaches in Science Teaching (FAST). FAST emphasizes hands-on experiences through which students discover important science concepts and develop laboratory and thinking skills, therefore much of class time is spent performing and discussing laboratory experiments. The second semester is a mixture of in-class experiments and field-science explorations. In both semesters, students partake in large-scale design projects, which provide students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the material through creative problem solving and help to develop their skills as innovators. 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 & Scale Geometry

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 such as percent increase and decrease, scale modeling, and unit conversions. 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 & Geometric Transformations

This course provides more foundational understanding for the branches of mathematics. Students begin the year with intensive work with direct linear relationships 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. Next, students explore more advanced number operations, including exponents, scientific notation, radicals, and work with irrational numbers. The year concludes with volume of solid figures, focusing on volume of cylinders, cones, and spheres.

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. 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

The class begins with a study of recursive sequences as discrete linear and exponential patterned models. This quickly transitions to a comprehensive study of what makes a function: their uses in modeling and representing data, making predictions with them with an equation, and how they can be "transformed." Functions of interest include -- though are not be limited by—linear, absolute value, quadratic, cubic, cube root, square root, exponential, logarithmic and rational. Particular emphasis is placed on exponential and logarithmic models. Students explore the significance that domain and range have on the constraints regarding how those functions can be used. As the second half of the year commences, students experience an in-depth study of quadratics. In this unit, many connections between math and physics are explored. This segues to the geometry of circles where students delve into the abstract world of plane geometry with circles as the context. The year wraps up with conic sections.

Math 5: Functions, Statistics and Trigonometry

The main goal of Math 5 is for students to gain confidence in their ability to use advanced algebra and geometry (linear, quadratics, and exponential modelling, function transformations, and trigonometry) in their problem-solving. They hone these mathematical skills while exploring different topics in math, which will include statistics, probability, sequences and series, vectors, polynomials, and plane geometry. Students strengthen fundamental skills that will be useful or necessary for all fields of study, the next math class they take either in high school or college, and the ACT, PSAT/SAT.

Pre-Calculus

Pre-requisite: Math 4 with a grade of 80% or higher or Math 5

In the first semester, students explore function behavior, specifically polynomials of nth 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.

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. Traditional

scientific disciplines are split into semester courses over multiple years to foster an understanding of the interconnectedness of all science.

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 in 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 ecological sciences. Much of the first semester curriculum is adapted from a program called Foundational Approaches in Science Teaching (FAST). FAST emphasizes hands-on experiences through which students discover important science concepts and develop laboratory and thinking skills, therefore much of class time is spent performing and discussing laboratory experiments. The second semester is a mixture of in-class experiments and field-science explorations. In both semesters, students partake in large-scale design projects, which provide students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the material through creative problem solving and help to develop their skills as innovators. 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.

Introduction to Ecology and Biology

7th Grade Semester Course

This course is devoted to the interactions between the biotic and abiotic landscape of Vermont. The first quarter focuses on the pure science of Ecology, with an emphasis on the energy and matter cycles. The second quarter introduces the students to the study of basic Biology. We use the specific content learned in the Living Vermont class to provide examples as we learn about the history of life on Earth. The primary experimental tool for both Ecology and Biology is student

designed-and-built EcoMachines. In addition to providing an experimental tool, these desktop aquatic systems also introduce these scientists to the collaborative design process that will encompass most of their eighth grade curriculum.

Scientific Methods

8th Grade Semester Course

A primary emphasis in science education at VCS is to produce students that not only know the scientific method, but are able to apply it to answer questions about the natural world. The 8th grade Scientific Methods class has been designed with that purpose in mind; to create skilled, knowledgeable and confident experimenters. This semester-long course begins with an introduction of the Philosophy of Science and the history of scientific methodology. With a clear understanding of the goal of science, students dive into each step of the current scientific method. Students apply the scientific method as they complete investigations in multiple disciplines and use their knowledge to conduct experiments of their own design.

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 give students practice with justifying those decisions with empirical data and logical rationale. Students are exposed to the basics of electromechanical design and computer programming, using a microcontroller-driven platform. Over the course of the semester, students 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 laboratory and quantitative analysis 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 to the continuous 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.

Physics I

10th Grade Semester Course

This course uses the study of motion to introduce students to the overarching 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 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.

Electives

12th Grade

In the senior year, students vote to select science electives. Some offerings may 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. Three organ systems are the focus of study during the semester: the musculoskeletal, nervous, and cardiovascular systems, For each, 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 con?icts 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 begin at the level of the molecular biology that drives the function of a single neuron. From this foundation the course then moves into the gross anatomy of the nervous system, including the regional specialization of brain structures in addressing different nervous system functions, and how modern imaging methods enable cutting-edge research into brain function. Utilizing their understanding of healthy nervous system function, students will individually choose a neurological disease to study in detail, exploring both the causes and consequences of the disease.

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.

Elective: Space Science

In this semester-long course students will explore the universe through an introduction to a variety of academic disciplines: astronomy, planetary science, aerospace engineering, history, and astrophysics. Major topics will include the creation of the universe and Earth's place in it, rocketry, and a history of space exploration. The lab component of the course will primarily consist of engineering and design, but students will also be expected to attend three evening classes to observe and chart celestial objects. Multiple field trips will enhance our understanding through interactive experiences.

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 citizenship. Seventh grade students get the long view through Big History, a course that sets the framework for their next several years of history classes. The eighth through tenth grades take the long view of human history from ancient through modern times, always connecting the past to today. Eleventh and twelfth grade students choose from a variety of semester-long elective courses, with all eleventh graders taking Modern United States History during their Spring semester.

Interdisciplinary Humanities: Who Are We As Vermonters?

6th Grade

6th Grade Humanities examines who we are as Vermonters, and is an introductory civics course at heart as we look closely at the workings of government through place-based and project-based

learning. We study the landscape, history, people and idea of Vermont, from its first inhabitants to its current population. We examine and debate a current state bill and then watch the legislature in-session and dig into an issue impacting our local government and politics. In this interdisciplinary course, students work on creative and formal writing, critical thinking, and oral communication skills, as tools to communicate their thoughts as citizens. There is a daily practice of grammar/usage/mechanics, and students' reading is choice-based as we explore a number of literary genres over the course of the year.

Big History

7th Grade

This class provides a framework for all following Social Studies classes at Vermont Commons. Big History explores 13.8 billion years of history—beginning at the Big Bang and ending in the future. The class focuses in depth on early human migration, the Neolithic transition to agriculture, and many ancient cultures, in order to prepare students for 8th grade Social Studies. This course allows students to ask the big questions of life: Where did we come from? What makes us human? What is civilization? The year culminates in a Little Big History project in which students trace an object of their choosing through all of time and space.

Empires, Networks & Beliefs through 1500 CE

8th Grade

This course looks at the global maturing of human civilizations, belief systems and the growth of human networks of exchange, from the Ancient Greeks to the Mongols. This class focuses on patterns and systems of change, while challenging students to think critically and formulate investigative questions. Students each write a fully developed 5-7 page research paper on an historical topic of their choosing.

Global Studies I - 1500-1800

9th Grade

This class explores the period between 1500-1800 as the first period of globalization and the blossoming of the modern world, with a special focus on United States history. The unifying theme of the course is the idea of a human web - the links that humans create to exchange ideas, goods, customs, technologies, and religions. Students view the global changes between 1500- 1800 through intellectual, cultural, political, economic, social, ecological, and demographic lenses. The curriculum culminates in rise of representative government during the Age of Revolutions (American, French, Haitian), and U.S. civics. This class is discussion-based and includes analyzing viewpoints in primary and secondary sources, debating alternative views and opinions, and writing and presenting an 8-10 page research paper.

Global Studies II - 1800-1950

10th Grade

This class looks at the period 1800-1950 as the radical transformation of human societies due to the Industrial Revolution and the use of fossil fuels, with an emphasis on United States history. This class uses the global trends of industrial development and imperialism as cornerstones for analyzing massive social, political, and economic, intellectual and ecological global changes, global inequality, and the build-up to and impact of the world wars. Students engage in formal debate, discuss social and political philosophies, and write a 10-12-page research paper on historical and current topics.

Modern U.S. History in a Global Context

11th Grade Spring Semester

This class looks at U.S. history since the end of World War II (Cold War, Vietnam, Civil Rights and other popular movements, U.S. foreign policy). Every opportunity is taken to incorporate and draw connections to topics currently in the news. This class is discussion and debate focused. Throughout the semester we run a series of multi-position US foreign policy debates that allow us to explore differing perspectives on the role of the United States in the great global unfolding. Students write commentaries and opinion-pieces, and develop a culminating project that digs into and addresses a global issue of personal interest.

Electives

11th and 12th Grade Fall Semesters, plus 12th Grade Spring

During the Junior and Senior years, students enroll in mixed-grade semester-long 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 may include:

Elective: Perspectives on the Isreali-Palestinian Conflict

How many different people claim Jerusalem as their holy city and homeland? What does it even mean for a place to be your homeland? In light of these questions, this elective course explores the intense conflict in present-day Israel/Palestine. Our focus is seeing the conflict from many different perspectives in order to gain a deep understanding of its complexity. Here's a taste of the many voices we be explore: Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories (Christian and Muslim voices), Palestinian refugees living outside of Palestine, Jewish Israelis (cultural and religious), Arab-Israelis, Jews living outside of Israel, and more. Everyone has their own story to tell. We use literature, film, music, and art as mediums. The class begins with mapping, in an attempt to gain a sense of the region. Short weekly reflective and academic writing is assigned to narrate and identify different perspectives. Students do independent research on topics of interest and run class once/week. There

is a culminating project that asks students to creatively narrate 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: An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States

This course examines United States history and the mythologies that shape our national identity. We explore indigenous America, the founding of the United States, westward expansion of European culture through indigenous lands, and the numerous hot issues that are in the news today; all from a perspective that is often missing from today's national discourse. Our vehicles for exploration include reading, student-led discussions, short and long papers, videos, and guest speakers. Upon completion of this course the students will have gained new insights into the nature of the United States as well as integrity in the telling of our nation's story.

Elective: Current Issues

In this class for those 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 ways 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: 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 explore how our modern world has been shaped and reshaped. The course looks first at the culture of colonialism, and then explores 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? 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 are designed to inspire creative confidence and form a template for a meaningful, lifelong relationship with the Arts. In grades 7-11, students choose between Art or Music courses each year. Sixth graders take both art and music, and seniors all take art.

Patterns in Nature

6th Grade

In this course we develop skills in observational drawing, learn new elements in composition and work on artistic arrangements involving patterns in nature. We draw spheres & cubes, develop one point perspective skills, paint impossible castles like MC Escher and have fun learning the never ending possibilities of the creative process. Students are also introduced to the importance of keeping a sketchbook and the dialogue involved in critiquing art.

Piano and Guitar Fundamentals

7th Grade Fall Semester

Get ready for a musical journey that touches on many topics including: piano and guitar skills, history, theory, and more! We also compose our own songs and improvise on a range of instruments. We study music from all eras including classical, jazz, blues, rock and pop. Each student will get to choose a song to learn and then perform at the end of the class. No previous music experience required.

Animals in Nature

7th Grade Fall Semester

In this course, students develop their artistic practice through the process of making descriptive, visualized and symbolic drawing studies of animals. Projects include mad dog drawings, paint by number cats, and colorful, abstract studies of birds in boxes. By the end of the semester, artists in this class will have a better command of their observational drawing skills, a good understanding of shading and perspective, and an established sense of creative confidence.

Composition & Theory

8th Grade Spring Semester

Get ready for a musical journey that touches on many topics including: piano and guitar skills, history, theory, and more! We also compose our own songs and improvise on a range of instruments. We study music from many genres including classical, jazz, blues, rock and pop. Each student chooses a song to learn and then perform at the end of the class. No previous music experience required.

Manuscripts

8th Grade Spring Semester

In this studio class, the 8th graders use the manuscript for a source of inspiration. Artists gild paper with gold, copy pages from the Books of Kells, and draw the inventions from Da Vinci's sketchbooks. Students develop an appreciation of art history, continue to work on sketchbooks skills, and become more confident in their voices during critiques. This course also places emphasis on the conceptual spin in the world, and will introduce students to artists that work in this style.

Songwriting

9th Grade Fall Semester

In 9th grade music we learn what makes a good composition, study music from many different genres and learn how to write and notate our own compositions for a range of different instrumentations. We learn about form, theory, melody and harmony and compose music in genres including classical, pop, rock, blues and more. We also learn piano skills that will help us develop and perform our compositions. Experience is welcome but not required.

Pop Art

9th Grade Fall Semester

This course revolves entirely around Pop Art. Students begin this class by cutting up and collaging old comic books and developing their own comic book heroes. Students continue experimenting in the studio with a series of expressive, technical, and conceptual appropriations that relate to various artists. 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 works of appropriations for their portfolio and a better understanding of how art history since 1945 works.

Genres and Instrumentation

10th Grade Spring Semester

In tenth grade music we learn what makes a good composition, study music from many different genres and learn how to write and notate our own compositions for a range of different instrumentations. We learn about form, theory, melody and harmony and compose music in genres including classical, pop, rock, blues and more. We also learn piano and guitar skills that help us develop and perform our compositions. Experience is welcome but not required.

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.

History, Performance, Composition and Improvisation

11th Grade Fall Semester

Beethoven. Metallica. The bassoon. Mixolydian scales. This class is a crash course on the history and inner workings of music throughout western civilization. We explore genres, instruments, composers, bands and a variety of other musical concepts. Students also perform, compose and

improvise on instruments. Musical experience is welcome but not necessary, and the end of the course will culminate with a class performance.

Fallen Persimmons

11th Grade Fall Semester

This class focuses on Japanese art. We work on colorful wood block prints in the style of Hokusai, develop our own manga characters while reading A Bride's Story by Kaoru Mori, understand tattoos better while looking at the studios of Horiyoshi and read a Haiku by Basho. We also practice our culinary skills while making sushi and perfecting the broth in a ramen soup.

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 the relative artists are practicing. At the end of the semester, students will 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.

Depending on enrollment, upper level courses are often combined to form sections for levels III/IV and IV/V.

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, videos and personal interviews. Students develop more complex stories, this time in the past tense. Students read longer novels on a variety of subjects, from folktales to mystery novels to everyday accounts. Spontaneous dialogues are encouraged and class discussion is richer. Longer presentations are required and students are expected to journal once a week. Video projects are a commonly used as assessments at the end of the quarter. Class is conducted mainly in Spanish.

Spanish III

This class is taught entirely in Spanish and moves quickly through several new verb structures such as the future, 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 novels with a strong cultural component but still modified for students of Spanish.

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. Class is conducted fully in Spanish.

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, debating hot-button topics, and listening to primary sources. Speaking and writing fully in Spanish is expected. In this class students participate in debates on a regular basis, journaling, conversing with native speakers and watching series created for a native speaker audience.

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 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:

Speaking for the Trees

This class explores the relationship between humans and trees from many angles. Working with Branch Out Burlington!, students spend time in the Burlington Tree Nursery caring for and learning about the trees that will be planted on our city streets and in parks. They travel to Burlington to help maintain its green spaces and corridors, and to observe for themselves how trees impact the urban environment. They also meet with representatives from organizations such as Burlington Parks and Recreation, and the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program to learn about the work being done to preserve our green spaces. Students make and keep their own tree journals,

documenting the species that live in VCS's backyard as well as those in Burlington and nearby woods such as Red Rocks, Centennial Woods, and East Woods. In class, they explore topics such as the benefits of urban trees, the challenges facing city arborists, the importance of nature in childhood development, and the symbolic role that trees have played in literature and art.

Community Conversations

This class focuses on developing relationships with older members of the South Burlington community and documenting our interactions with them. Through a partnership with the Vermont Folklife Center students learn about technology and skills needed to conduct a thorough interview, and will then use this knowledge to create a permanent record (written text, photos, and video) of the oral histories of local citizens.

Gleaning, Digging, Fermenting and Fomenting

Can we change the world with the food that we eat and make? Can eating be a revolutionary act? This class looks at the big questions relating to our local, national, and global systems: What do our choices around food have to do with community resilience and the state of the world - climate change, resource distribution, global nutrition, obesity, etc.? Should we all be vegan localvores? Why not? But the real meat & potatoes of this class will be working on local farms, learning about what they're producing and how and why, while providing our labor. We glean whatever we can and we will then teach ourselves how to preserve what we have harvested. We learn skills in harvesting, and food preparation and preservation. The fruits of our labor will be donated or sold to benefit a cause of our choice. All the while we be debating what we should have for lunch!

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.

Mapping for Humanity

These ain't your grandma's maps. These maps can save the world. As you know, our planet is full of problems - both natural and manmade - and the internet is full of data. What if we can use data to

make digital maps that help address REAL problems in the world? Our partners at UVM's Spatial Analysis Lab are doing just that, and we're going to join them! We won't just be learning to use the super-cool technology ourselves, though - we'll be collaborating with members of the local resettled refugee community to use the software to address crises in their own countries of origin. Mapping for good: With great power comes great responsibility . . .

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?

Environmental Journalism

During this course, we focus on the invaluable service that journalism provides in our society, learning about it through visits to media outlets such as Vermont Public Radio and Seven Days, as well as through question and answer sessions with journalists of all kinds. We read and view examples of quality journalism, and examine issues around the ethics of the craft, such as bias, the proliferation of "fake news," and the media's tendency to focus only on negative stories. Each student will "pitch" a story on a current environmental topic to the class, and then work to create a media project, such as an article, video, or podcast, that communicates information about it in a dynamic way. We will publish the finished products on a blog that will be available to both the VCS community as well as the greater Chittenden County community. We also partner with a local environmental organization to help them get the word out about their work and initiatives.

Healthy Waters

The average American uses approximately 80 - 100 gallons of water per day. And yet, many of us never stop to consider where that water comes from, how clean it is, and how we impact that source of water. This is a science-based R & S, in which we will investigate water quality issues on a local, national, and international scale. In addition, we'll monitor the health of a local waterway and work to increase the awareness of water quality issues in the VCS and South Burlington communities.

Technology Exposed

Let's look at Youtube videos, the tweets of politicians, and Kathy Ryan's most recent Instagram post! Why are they so important? Why do they have so much influence over everything we do, see, buy and elect? We may not get all the answers, but we will certainly start some good conversations, dissect some amazing youtube videos, post some pictures and tweet a few tweets. As service, we will

work with the senior community, helping to educate elderly people on the complexities of the internet. We will work with local refugee populations to help "brand" designs for their new companies. This class will all also invite individuals and corporations that use social media and understand the importance of its responsible practices.

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 October, February, 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 embark on leadership training 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 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 middle school 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. High school students complete their P.E. requirement by combining two of the following options: an active encounter week, a Vermont Commons sport, a semester of middle school P.E., and/or, an outside of school physical activity taking place at least two hours per week.

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
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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.