Vermont Commons School Curriculum

Scholarship. Community. Global Responsibility.

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students,

Vermont Commons School's curriculum utilizes collaborative, hands-on, and often field-based teaching methodologies to develop and inspire intellectualism, practical skills, and pure grit. Our graduates tend to find themselves overly prepared--in the best sense--for the college educations they pursue after Vermont Commons.

Our 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. They pursue unique study of a wide range of electives topics as well as yearly, ongoing study of the arts. Course offerings integrate topics into multi-year studies rather than as separate and distinct courses. Students further along in their studies have a variety of independent and self-designed learning options, from Contract Honors courses to Internships or specialized Diploma Certificates. As a result of this curricular approach and our small class sizes--which allow for creativity and collaboration--students grow into critical and innovative thinkers, able to perceive, interpret, and engage the systems, challenges, and opportunities 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 Electives Program integrates analysis, research, and communication skills to allow students to explore new topics in multi-age groups. 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 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 an Elective course 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, lunchtime 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, an online program, to assist in the college search and application 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 College Counseling Staff routinely visit 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 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.

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.

Writing for Social Change & Rhetorical Studies

10th Grade

English 10 focuses on social commentary and rhetorical analysis. We use a variety of texts to examine the strategies authors use to effect change. 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). Each of our core texts and each assignment is designed to help students develop their critical thinking, reading, writing, and presenting skills. This course aligns with an introductory college level rhetoric and writing curriculum which teaches students to develop evidence based arguments and essays.

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

The Single-Author Study is designed to teach students to write a college-level analytical paper on a topic that interests them. During the course, students work through the process of creating an advanced study of an author's body of work by building on their knowledge of literary theory and analytical skills. Students identify a critical approach that they use to interpret the texts they read by their chosen author. 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 a college-level thesis paper. 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, Jeannette 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.

Math 0: Approaches to Problem Solving

6th Grade

The 6th grade math curriculum provides foundational knowledge in many topics in order to prepare students for math in future years. Topics include ratios and proportions, statistics and graphing, algebraic functions, and area and volume of geometric figures. However, the common theme throughout each of these units, and the essential aim of the course, is developing the tools to allow students to confidently and creatively problem solve. Challenge problems, games, and multi-step tasks are a part of every week, and students learn that there is no one right way to find a solution. While 6th grade math is taught as an independent course, it is intensively linked with science. Therefore, the curriculum is designed so that skill development and content consistently overlaps and supports the science curriculum.

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 study of geometric transformation, specifically dilation to extend their understanding of similarity. This leads to a linear models unit where students model data using the slope-intercept equation. More abstract traditional algebra begin 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 and solve them algebraically using different methods. 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.

Statistics

Prerequisite: Math 4 or pre-calculus
Recommended for seniors

This course explores a statistical approach to decision making under uncertainty. Topics include descriptive statistics, probability distributions, inferential statistics, confidence intervals, hypothesis testing, linear regression and correlation. The focus of this class is on the use of statistics as a tool to help navigate through an uncertain world of stats, facts, data, information, and persuasive arguments generated by entities that may not have your best interest in mind. As a consumer of information it is important to know when this information is significant and when it is meaningless.As a distributor of information it is useful to know how to present your data/argument in a clear and truthful manner. As a decision maker it is useful to know how to base decisions on statistical evidence and protect yourself from uncertainties.

Pre-Calculus

Prerequisite: Math 4 with a grade of 80% or higher

Recommended for juniors and seniors

In the first semester, students explore function behavior, specifically polynomials of n^{th} degree, radical, absolute value, piecewise, 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

Prerequisite: Pre-calculus with a grade of 80% or higher

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.

The World of Science!!!

6th Grade

The sixth grade science curriculum in broken into two parts: the first part of the year is dedicated to the physical sciences, primarily topics in chemistry and physics, this is then followed by an introduction to ecological sciences. Much of the first 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 ecology curriculum is a mixture of in-class experiments and field-science explorations. Throughout the year, students partake in large-scale design projects, which provide them an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the material through creative problem solving and help to develop their skills as innovators. Ultimately, the main goals of the course are for students to develop a love of science and of problem solving, and to generate strong foundational skills with deep conceptual understanding. While sixth grade science is taught as an independent course, it is intensively linked with math. Therefore, the curriculum is designed so that skill development and content consistently overlaps and supports the math curriculum.

The Living Vermont

7th Grade

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. We examine energy flow through ecosystems, and use the design and construction of EcoMachines as an introduction to trophic webs and the engineering design process. Field journals are the backbone of the course; every organism we encounter will be recorded in this journal. Most classes are held in the field.

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 eighth 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 design challenges. To develop solutions to these challenges, students employ understanding of scientific concepts as well as artistic creativity. Projects are designed to require significant prototyping, testing, and revision, with emphasis on the value of "failure" during testing as an essential part of an effective design process. In-class presentations give students practice justifying design decisions based on logical rationale. Design challenges presented during the semester expose students to computer-assisted drafting (CAD) and 3D printing, as well as the basics of electromechanical design and computer programming. At different times during 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 science's role in 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, execution of experiments at the lab bench, data collection and analysis, and collaboration and communication skills.

Biology I

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 physics – explanation of 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 one- and two-dimensional motion. Newton's 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 topic of their choosing, using video analysis as a tool to enable the quantitative description the motion of selected objects.

Biology II

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.

Physics II

11th Grade Semester Course

The transfer of energy from one form to another is the unifying theme in this course. Beginning with study of the mechanical energy objects contain, we then move into the concepts of momentum and impulse and their role in 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 the 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.

Chemistry II

11th Grade Semester Course

This course leverages the math and science skills students have acquired over 2+ years of high school-level coursework, to more deeply understand the phenomena that drive chemical reactions. The course begins by using examples of chemical reactions using commonplace materials 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 the understanding of energy developed by students during Physics II, we then undertake an extensive study of energy changes associated with chemical reactions and factors that influence the rate of chemical reactions.

Electives

12th Grade

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

Elective: Animal Behavior

Prerequisite: Biology II

College-level readings and independent experimentation are large parts of this course. 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

Prerequisites: Biology I & Chemistry I

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

Prerequisites: Biology I & II

College-level readings and independent experimentation are large parts of this course. Students engage in a yearlong examination of the Kingdom Animalia. Using a phylogenic approach to understand the evolutionary history of our Kingdom, students spend most of a semester understanding the invertebrate members of Animalia. During the second portion of the course, 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 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

Prerequisite: Chemistry II

This course focuses on the structure and function of the human nervous system, particularly the brain. Exploration will begin at the molecular level to understand the 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 to address 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 explore the universe through an introduction to a variety of academic disciplines: astronomy, planetary science, aerospace engineering, history, and astrophysics. Major topics are dependent on student interest but may include the creation of the universe and Earth's place in it, rocketry, a history of space exploration, or the search for extraterrestrial life. The lab component of the course will primarily consist of engineering and design but, depending on time and course content, evening classes to observe and chart celestial objects may also be included. 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 on 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 Israeli-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 People's 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 gain 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 Art and Music courses. Experiences are designed to inspire creative confidence and form a template for a meaningful, lifelong relationship with the Arts. Students take a grade-level Art *or* Music semester course each year and many years have the choice between the two.

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.

Introduction to Music

6th Grade

In this course, students learn basic concepts of music theory, apply those concepts to develop specific skills in music appreciation, explore beginning composition, and learn basic instrument skills--often piano--and musical notation.

Piano and Guitar Fundamentals

7th Grade

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

In this course we will be drawing animals. We will sketch coyote skulls, a wolf's head in perfect symmetry and try to make our own prints in the style of the German printmaker, Dürer. This class places emphasis on observational drawing skills and working in the collaborative environment of a school studio. Students will also view slides of other artists who worked with animals for inspiration, and will continue to work on sketchbook skills and conversations while critiquing work.

Composition & Theory

8th Grade

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.

Conceptual and Dynamic Drawing

8th Grade

This studio course will study the basic techniques of technical drawing skills and mediums that relate to drawing. We will draw in a variety of formats and surfaces and work with concepts that invite a poetic spin to our compositions. To better understand our studio practices we will have slideshows of artists in history that worked with similar mediums and concepts. Artists will be responsible for maintaining work in their sketchbooks on a weekly basis. By the end of the semester, artists will be more confident in their approach to drawing a viable and conceptual representation of forms.

Songwriting

9th Grade Spring 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 Spring Semester

This course revolves around Pop Art. Students begin this class by cutting up and collaging old comic books, printing on brown paper bags and using old candy wrappers to make crowns. 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.

The Self In Portrait

10th Grade Spring Semester

This course prepares students to paint a convincing representation of the portrait subjects from a photograph and other sources. Students will begin this course by studying artists that used the photograph as a source of inspiration for the portrait. We will print our photographs in a variety of formats and learn the basics in drawing and scales representing value. Finally, we will paint from these photographs using a variety of techniques and mediums. Giacometti, Alice Neel, and Francis Bacon will serve as inspiration for studying the portraits. Students will be responsible for maintaining a "digital visual diary" throughout the semester that catalogues their photographs, studies and experiences.

History, Performance, Composition and Improvisation

11th Grade Spring 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.

Abstract Art

11th Grade Spring Semester

In this class students will focus on a non-representational visual language in art. Shape, form, color and line will be studied to create compositions of lyrical abstraction. There will be a particular emphasis placed on color and theories in color that relate to strong compositions. Art history will

continue to threads this class, and students will learn the foundations and importance of abstraction from prehistoric times to current developments.

20th Century Conceptual Art

12th Grade Spring Semester

This course explores contemporary themes in conceptual art. Slideshows, 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 & IV.

All students in grades 6, 7 and 8 take Spanish as an anchor in their foreign language education. Starting in 9th grade students can opt to take Chinese or Spanish, giving the possibility to graduate with two languages at the end of their high school career.

Spanish A

6th Grade

In this yearlong course, students are introduced to the Spanish speaking world through its culture and language. Students learn a starter vocabulary in Spanish giving them a solid foundation for the years ahead. Students help create in-class stories to achieve this. Basic reading materials are

presented on a regular basis and it is expected that students do mini-presentations about these stories. We also dedicate a good deal of time to the study of the main ancient civilizations developed in the Americas, with hands-on projects as cornerstones of the units. Throughout the year students also listen to music, dance, act, watch films, play games, and sample foods from Spanish speaking countries. This class is conducted half in Spanish, half in English.

Spanish B

7th grade

In Spanish B 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 essential 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. The class is conducted mainly in Spanish.

Spanish C

8th grade

In Spanish C students have solid speaking skills and are able to describe images, carry on brief spontaneous conversations and give presentations without writing aids. The study of irregular forms of the present tense is solidified, and high-frequency verbs are introduced in the past tense. Students are expected to journal once a week increasing the number of words written progressively. The cultural component is delivered through novellas and videos as well as hands-on projects. The class is conducted mainly in Spanish.

Spanish II

High School

Prerequisite: Spanish C or equivalent

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 commonly used as assessments at the end of the quarter. Class is conducted mainly in Spanish.

Spanish III

High School

Prerequisite: Spanish II or equivalent

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 particular 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

High School

Prerequisite: Spanish III or equivalent

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 know 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

High School

Prerequisite: Spanish IV or equivalent

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 A and B

7th and 8th Grade

Students in these sequential courses 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 in Chinese A, and over the course of Chinese A and B, 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 both years. A variety of games are also used to support students' learning. Students finish the second year (Chinese B) by reading their first graded Chinese novella.

Chinese II

High School

Prerequisite: Chinese 1 or equivalent

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

High School

Prerequisite: Chinese II

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

High School

Prerequisite: Chinese III

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

High School

Prerequisite: Chinese IV

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.

ELECTIVES

Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, students in both middle and high school will be able to select a semester-long elective class. These courses allow students to explore a topic outside of the traditional disciplines, and dig deeply into new content with multi-age peers. High school students choose their electives in the fall and middle school students have elective options in the spring.

Fall 2018 High School offerings:

"A Change is Gonna Come": Social Change Through Art and Action

In this class, we explore the art of American social protest movements, reaching back to the coded songs of freedom sung by enslaved Africans, to the visual art of contemporary resistance. Particular social movements that we focus on are the abolitionist movement, women's suffrage, Civil Rights, labor movements, protests against the Vietnam War, LGBTQ rights, and the environmental movement. Assessments include daily discussions, written responses to the music and visual art that we are examining, and a final gallery night, when students will display the art that they have created depicting an historical or current social movement to members of the community. Proceeds from sales of refreshments at this exhibit benefit a non-profit organization of the class's choosing. Over the course of the semester, students discover what was and is at stake in the movements for equality in our country, how the work of musicians and visual artists further social change, and how our own identities shape our experiences and perspectives on the world.

Filmmaking 101

In this class students learn to be filmmakers. From conceiving great stories and writing powerful scripts, to all the technical tricks of the trade, students learn the skills of video communication. Working in crews, students become proficient in camera operation, audio control, basic directing, lighting, and editing - producing several film projects throughout the semester.

Environmental Science (Ecology)

Environmental science is the study of the interactions between physical, biological, and chemical components of the environment. It is an extremely relevant discipline in today's world and we examine many pressing issues including alternative energy sources, climate change, global population growth, and pollution. We examine the material through laboratory and field investigations, class discussions and lecture, individual and group projects, and field trips.

Musical Performance, Arrangement and Composition

This performance-based course helps us stretch our musical minds and improve our musical skills. We play a variety of instruments and styles and write our own pieces for the group to perform. We also arrange music from various genres and have opportunities to perform out in our community.

Musical experience is welcome but not necessary and students will be required to practice at least 60 minutes a week outside of class.

Artist Portfolio

In this studio art class students are guided through the process of creating works that comprise senior level portfolios. Students are allowed more liberty than in standard studio art classes, but this liberty will be accompanied by more instructor guidance in creating rich ideas and then executing those ideas into salient pieces. Students must be ready to work independently exploring truth in art and building portfolio concepts. Each unit explores a variety of contemporary artists and take several field trips to better understand the mindspace of artists living today.

East Asian Cultural Project

This course is designed to teach students to identify common elements of East Asian culture including Social Organizations, Architecture, Customs and Traditions, Arts, Religions, Economics, Food and Clothing, and Music and Dance. The main focus will be on Chinese culture, other Asian cultures including Japanese culture and Korean culture will be combined and compared. The students research, cooperate, and contribute to apply their knowledge to theme projects and presentations which will illustrate their learning and understanding of a specific Asian culture.

Seniors have the option to engage in internships with local businesses, organizations, and professionals in lieu of an elective. Students select a faculty advisor to oversee their work and complete at least three hours per week of time at a job site as well as reflective assignments throughout the course.

Some possible future options include:

Philosophy
Debate
Epidemiology
Intro to Biochemical Methods
Criminal Justice: Mass Incarceration
Regime Change
Literature and the Land
Shakespeare: Page to Stage
African American Literature
Literature of Resistance
Robotics
Music Appreciation and Performance
Performing, Arranging, and Composing Music

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 Mount Desert Island in DownEast Maine on Monday, arriving at Blackwoods campground in Acadia National Park in the evening. After setting up camp, they walk a couple of hundred yards to the rocky coast to sit over the waves, under the Milky Way. Tuesday the group climbs the infamous Beehive mountain and feed the critters in Anemone Cave. Wednesday, they take their traditional dip in the North Atlantic (water temp of AT LEAST 35 degrees!!) and spend a contemplative solo hour at the Great Head tide pools. Thursday morning is volunteer trail-work with Friends of Acadia, followed by a naturalist's tour of the waters around Bah Habah in a converted Lobster Boat (BABY SEALS, BAM!!). The day ends with a stroll around town. Friday morning they break camp at around 3:30am to be the first North Americans to see the sunrise from the peak of Cadillac Mountain.

Adirondacks Canoeing

The Most Legendary Adirondack Canoeing Spring Encounter Week (or MLACSEW, for short) consists of a week of paddling and camping along Long Lake, the Raquette River, and Tupper Lake, all of which run along the High Peaks Wilderness area in New York State. Students who choose this trip should be excited to spend an entire week outdoors, regardless of the weather, and be up for the challenge of constant physical activity. Tarp-sailing! Portage! Stargazing! Fighting Jethro the Champion Bear by the Mount Thunder Fighting Stump! Well, some of those things, anyway. Prior

canoeing experience is not required.

Volleyball Clinics

Students travel all over Vermont, teaching volleyball. Volleyball experience is a plus, but students do NOT need to know volleyball or be on the team. They are paired with an experienced player during the beginning of the week...but they then have the option to run their own groups! The entire group works at the King Street Center with young (frequently New American) kids in their afterschool program, and they also work with elementary, middle, and high schools such as; Milton, Mater Christi, and Charlotte. In addition, students also work with some adult recreational players during a night league at Edmunds Middle School.

Music Immersion

Students spend the week learning about many facets of our amazing local music community! They play various instruments including piano, guitar, ukulele and steel drums, visit music stores around the area, learn about luthiery, compose electronic music, participate in a music therapy demonstration, attend performances around town and have our own group performance. Musical experience is welcome but not required.

Vermont's Dairy Farms: A Documentary Road Trip

Students grab video cameras and take to the road! With an investigative journalist's eye they head out around Vermont to dig behind the scenes of the changing terrain of our state's iconic livelihood: Dairy Farming. They learn what has led to a historic and pioneering partnership between farmers, farmworkers, between Migrant Justice and Ben And Jerry's, in the Milk With Dignity Campaign. From our campground homebase, students venture out each day to learn a bit more of the vast, complex web of issues that this industry and this campaign touches on. They talk with people on all sides of the issue, to capture great video footage, and to make their own short documentaries. Students deepen and broaden the quick 'headlines' about the loss of dairy farms in Vermont. They learn what has shaped, in large part, Vermont's history and its pastoral landscape and develop their skills as a storyteller, filmmaker and journalist.

BIG TRIPS

Each year Vermont Commons School designs trips to far-off destinations that require additional fees. In the past students have traveled to Belize, China, Ireland, and domestic locations; such as Crow Canyon in Colorado and St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands.. These trips coincide with the weeks designated for the Encounter Week Program. *Students fill out applications during the spring of the prior year.* Trips in 2018-19 include a visit to our sister school, El Colegio Santa Ana, in Peru, a week at the Teton Science School doing outdoor winter research, working for the National Park Service in St. John USVI maintaining parkland, and cultural and language immersion in China.

SENIOR PROJECT PROGRAM

The Vermont Commons School experience culminates with a Senior Project. At the end of their spring semester, seniors may choose to 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 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

Health seminars are held once a quarter during either morning or afternoon classes. These health seminars are taught by the Dean of Students and School Counselor and utilize the support of the core level group advisors. 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

Kat Aherns
Mathematics Instructor, Volleyball, Basketball & Ultimate Frisbee Coach, Appointed 2017
University of Vermont, B.S.

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

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

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School Counselor, Learning Specialist, Appointed 2015
University of Vermont, B.A., University of Vermont, M. Ed.

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

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Spanish Instructor, Ultimate Frisbee Coach, Appointed 2003
SUNY Binghamton, B.A., Tulane University, M.A.

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Chair, Social Studies Department, Director of Senior Projects, Appointed 2004
Connecticut College, B.A., Brooklyn College, M.A.

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English Instructor, College Counseling Team, Appointed 2004
University of Notre Dame, B.A., Harvard University, M.T.S., University of Washington, M.A.T.E.S.L.

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Chair, World Languages Department, Appointed 2004

Universidad Ricardo Palma, B.A., Saint Michael's College, M.A.

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Music Instructor, Cross Country Coach, Appointed 2016
University of Vermont, B.S.

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Assistant Head of School, Mathematics Instructor, Appointed 2008
Ithaca College, B.A.

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

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

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Registrar, Communications & Technical Director, Play Director, Appointed 2013
University of Massachusetts Lowell, B.A., University of Vermont, M.A.

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Castleton State College, MEd

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

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Middlebury College, B.A., Georgetown University, M.A.

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Bowdoin College, B.A.

Heather Moore

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Skidmore College, B.A., University of Vermont, M.A.

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Art Instructor, Appointed 2004
Saint Michael's College, B.A., Pratt Institute, M.S.

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Director of Admissions, Appointed 2013
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