

COMMONS REVIEW

A newsletter produced by Vermont Commons School, college preparatory education in South Burlington for students in grades 7-12.

What's New at VCS?

NEASC Accreditation - In December, VCS was accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The NEASC team commended VCS for its remarkable growth since 1997. (see pg. 7)

New Instructors & Staff - Laura Hall (Spanish), and Bradley Materick (Math)

Fond Farewells - With gratitude, we say goodbye to departing faculty member and VCS alumna Ruth Heindel. Ruth will be pursuing a PhD in Polar Science at Dartmouth College. (see pg. 6)

Board of Trustees - The Board welcomes Robert Hill, Brian Leffler, and Derrick Senior. We thank departing Board members Ken Edwards and Mike Rosen for their service. (see pg. 4)

New Computer Lab - Last summer, VCS Board Trustee George Starbuck spearheaded several green renovations at the school, including the construction of a new computer lab.

New Website - With feedback from students, parents, and staff, VCS launched a new, user-friendly website that reflects the essence of the school.

First Friday Alumni Gathering - In January, VCS Alumni returned to the school to catch up with old friends and to participate in a roundtable discussion with juniors and seniors about life after VCS.

New Literary Review, *Uncommon* - This year, led by Language Arts Instructor Jennifer Cohen and student editor Jordanna Dulaney, VCS students published a new literary review of student writing called *Uncommon*.

New Yurt - Thanks to the Class of 2011, VCS built a yurt in Huntington last summer. (see pg. 3)

UVM-VCS Calculus Class - VCS faculty will teach side by side with UVM professors on our campus and during our regular schedule to provide a college level, top quality, four credit calculus course to our juniors and seniors next year. (see pg. 7)

Big History Class - Vermont Commons School was chosen as a pilot school for Bill Gates and David Christian's program, Big History. This course will pack the history of the universe into one year of study. (see pg. 7)

Bus Shuttle Service - Next fall, VCS will offer shuttle bus service to the Milton Rt.89 interchange and then up the islands to South Hero and Grand Isle.



From left to right: Science Instructor Ruth Heindel, Eli Hinds, Lyn Ackert-Smith, Dean of Students Chance Cardamone-Knewstub, Lauren Howe, Lutes Bartlett, Miles Lamberson, Amber Quinlan, and Christian Frey

Fifteen Years of Building a Strong Financial Foundation The State of the School

Peter B. Gilmore, Head of School

Each spring I have the opportunity to present to the VCS community an evening where I describe the state and condition of the school. I say "opportunity" because as we are a school that never rests on our laurels, there are a wide variety of improvements to expound upon each time. This year was clearly no different, and you will find throughout this publication many of the great things we have done over the past nine months. The NEASC Accreditation, the new VCS Buses, the Class of 2011 Yurt, and our application for "F-1 Status" with the state department to host foreign students are just a few of the many milestones. One area of huge improvement, our finances, merits special attention, so I have decided to devote this space to it.

The finances of Vermont Commons have always been a major focus of the Board of Trustees and Head of School. As with all new and growing organizations our school has been no stranger to times of struggle and times of triumph. Fortunately this year, as the capstone to many years of vision, oversight, and prudence, represented the latter. Many young schools find that the earliest years are the toughest as they struggle to keep enrollments high, garner support from a small group of devotees, and practice fiscal responsibility in light of constant financial demands.

For VCS the year was exceptional in that for the first time the assets of the school have surpassed the liabilities on our balance sheet. It takes a lot of risk to launch a school, and financial outlays from the earli-

est days often remain with the organization for many, many years. In this our fifteenth year of operation, we have successfully passed the point where the initial financial burdens of starting the school are behind us. That is not to say we do not carry debt as purchasing the building last year has created a liability we will carry forward; however, owning our building and paying our mortgage each month allows us to add to the school's assets significantly every year. "Net Asset Positive" is where we are now and where we always want to be henceforth.

The first ever audit of the school, which took place in August of last year, also detailed the strong health of VCS, and will continue to reflect our improvements as we repeat the auditing process each summer. For the past five years, a balanced budget has been the hallmark of our financial oversight. It has allowed us to live within our means, and produce a small surplus to use in the further improvement of our condition. Carefully monitoring our revenues and expenses each month with updated reports and dashboard charts, we keep a close eye on our cash flows in and out of the institution. We are careful to reinvest all proceeds of our endowment and do so wisely, so that our safety net can grow. Even as enrollment has risen and fallen, the economy has struggled along, and major capital expenditures such as new classrooms and computer equipment have occurred, we have been able to steadily improve our financial condition.

(Continued on pg. 8)

What was your best moment at VCS this year? Gabe Mantegna



"It was my first day of school getting lost in the hallway and immediately having all the seniors show me around."
Nic Horgan, 7th grade



"My favorite VCS moment was cliff-sitting in Acadia with Ryan and Miles."
Grace Seeley, 10th grade



"It was in Belize, on a six-mile hike barefoot through the mud. We went through this giant river and it was just so much fun being with such a great group in the middle of the jungle."
Katiya Boudette, 11th grade



"My best VCS moment was the first day when we all shook hands and introduced each other. It made me feel very welcome because I was new and I was kind of scared."
Peter Larsen, 10th grade

Environmental Engineering Research & Service Class Protects Local Watershed

Peter Goff, Science Chair

This spring, a hearty band of 7th, 9th, and 11th graders worked in our local watershed to better understand recent changes and how we might be able to address some of those changes. We began in a workshop with Jim Pease of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. He tasked us with recording the erosion in the lake-ward streams of the watershed. As you can see in the photo, the lack of snow this winter really helped us effectively document aggradation, degradation, and other stream-wide changes.



Jordan Cannon and Lauren Howe collecting data

On non-field days, our junior-led groups of three led presentations on endangered or invasive species in the watershed or class discussions on environmental management issues. Examples included presentations on Vermont wild cats, polluted rivers catching fire, and the fate of our bat populations. On one particularly warm February day, we spent the afternoon clearing trash out of Pine Haven Shores Brook. We removed a mini-bus full of trash including construction debris, old pipes, barbed-wire, sediment-embedded tarps/carpets, and other miscellaneous trash.

Once we gathered enough data on the Pine Haven, North, and Bartlett Brooks (all between VCS and the lake), we presented our findings to Jim Pease and a local long-time resident/home-owner. Our study sites are shown in Figure 1, each label on the map indicates a

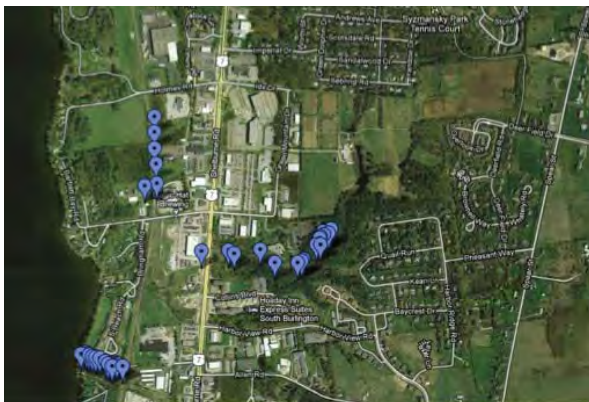


Figure 1

study site where we measured erosion. Our community partners were so impressed that they arranged for us to present to the South Burlington Natural Resources Committee and the Shelburne Natural Resources Committee. Adrian Kelly (9th grade) and Will Shane (7th grade) were first to present, and they both did an outstanding job. At the end of their presentation, one of the committee members remarked that Adrian and Will's presentation was as strong or stronger than most of the presentations by adults.

During the following week, WPTZ Channel 5 filmed our class in the field and while that story was being aired, juniors Henry Sadler and Ross Hiatt were joined by 7th-grader Sean Kerr who presented the results of our work to Shelburne. As in South Burlington, this crew delivered very well. The bordering towns agreed to consider changing their zoning systems to better protect this rapidly changing watershed. As a result of his hard work over the course of the semester, Adrian Kelly earned the school's Research & Service award for 2012. Congratulations, Adrian!



"What a wonderful school Vermont Commons School is. I wish every school in the country could have a staff, administration, and student body as engaged and friendly as yours. The students are the most brilliant I've ever met. What a pleasure to visit."

- Howard Frank Mosher

Howard Frank Mosher presents at Vermont Commons School

Howard Frank Mosher at Common Text Day

Howard Frank Mosher, author of ten novels and a travel memoir, including *Where the Rivers Flow North*, *Disappearances*, and *A Stranger in the Kingdom*, spoke to students at Vermont Commons School on Common Text Day last October.

This year's Common Text Day was devoted to exploring the school's year-long theme of Celebrating Diversity. Over the summer, students

in grades 7 and 8 read Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and students in grades 9 through 12 read Mosher's *A Stranger in the Kingdom*. Both novels deal with issues of prejudice in small towns. Mosher talked about his writing process and how he became a writer. He also answered student questions about his writing process.

VCS Ultimate Team Shows Their Spirit



Joey Carrara, Eli Hulse, Adam Coll, and Justin Decatur

Chance Cardomone Knewstubb, Dean of Students

The VCS Ultimate Frisbee team played its 7th season with true spirit. Spirit is what sets the game of Ultimate apart and is what makes it such a wonderful sport to coach at VCS. Expressed most simply, spirit dictates that Ultimate players respect their opponents as they would their teammates and themselves. It also commands that players will never intentionally cheat. This means that

Ultimate is almost always played without referees.

This year's Flying Turtle Ultimate Frisbee team displayed the Ultimate spirit in many ways. Seniors mentored 7th graders, 9th graders supported from the sidelines, and camaraderie was shared with opposing teams. All 35 of the co-ed Ultimate Flying Turtles knew that they were valued members of a team that took itself and its goals quite seriously. Best of all we had some real athletes working hard to master this beautiful game.

"West Side Story" Lights Up the Stage



The cast and crew of *West Side Story* - first row, seated: Lucy Pappas. Oban Galbraith, Second row, standing: Rachel Saunders, Henry Sadler, Amber Quinlan, Camille Bartsch, Nina Mantegna, Katiya Boudette, Mitchell Leffler, Danny Kaufmann, Maggie Homer, Justine Magowan, Gabe Mantegna, Haley Harder, Katharina Thomas, Nora Hill, Jordanna Dulaney, Anna Leffler, and Amira Silverman

In partnership with the Very Merry Theatre, the Vermont Commons School proudly presented "West Side Story" to a sold-out audience at the Main Street Landing's Waterfront Theater this April. The musical performance featured talented teens from grades 7 to 12. The show was Co-directed by Mickey Pekar

and Denise Viscomi, with choreography by Karen Amirault and musical direction by Brian Lynam and Ashley O'Brian. Ben Patrick, Vermont Commons' Director of Visual and Performing Arts and Artist in Residence, produced the performance.

Teacher Feature: Laura Hall and Bradley Materick Reflect on Their First Year at VCS

As their first year at VCS winds down, World Language Instructor Laura Hall and Math Instructor Bradley Materick reflect on their experience.

What did you think of your first year at VCS?

Laura: My first year was great! I really enjoyed working in a small community where teachers and administrators work together for the success of the students. As a teacher I still have a lot to learn and I really appreciate the feedback from colleagues who observed my classes.

Bradley: I had a wonderful first year! Although I have been teaching outdoor education for many years, this was my first year of classroom teaching. I found it to be very different, challenging, and rewarding. It was great to work with a group of students for a full year rather than a few days or weeks at a time.

What were the highlights of this year?

Laura: Working with friendly and professional administrators and teachers, Encounter Weeks, the cooking competition, department meetings, staff meetings, and the World Language festival, where

students presented a little bit of what they learned through out the year.

Bradley: My students were definitely the highlight! I am continually impressed by their interest and creativity. They are not afraid to speak their minds and ask me tough questions, and I love that as a teacher.

What are you looking forward to next year?

Laura: I am looking forward to a new year of teaching and participating in professional development classes/seminars.

Bradley: I am looking forward to implementing the new ideas and activities for my class that came out of my experience teaching this first year.



Laura Hall teaches Spanish



Bradley Materick teaches Math

Students Travel to Sundance Film Festival, Belize, and Peru

Sundance Film Festival

This year, VCS students traveled to the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. Students enjoyed the mountains and local culture, while attending films with the global arts community.



Back Row: Ben Patrick, Jackson Rose, Gabe Mantegna, and Ellis Govoni Front Row: Eliot Crawford, Maggie Homer, Mae Kemsley, Mia Jager, Jonah Kraynak, Henry Frantz, and Ryan Miller

Belize

Ten students traveled to Belize. VCS student Elsa Hollyer felt that “The home stay visits really made me appreciate how little we need. I was happier in Belize than I have been in a long time. It made me appreciate what is necessary and what life is really about.”



Behind table: Tim Sears, Katiya Boudette, and Willis Strausser

Peru

In May, ten VCS students ventured to Peru. One highlight was swimming with seals in the ocean.



Aidan Villani-Holland, Grace Seely, Lex Jackson, Mark Cline Lucey, Dyson Lord, Nora Hill, Eliot Crawford, Miles Lamberson

VCS Builds a Yurt for Encounter Weeks

Mark Cline Lucey, Social Studies Chair, and Heather Moore, Social Studies Instructor



Back row: Liam Callahan, Nate Jaffe, Joey Carrara, Josh Minot, Forrest Hamilton, and Willie Strausser Front row: Mark Cline Lucey, Nathan Gamble, Josh Wolfstein, Maggie Homer, Tim Sears, Maddy Roberts

Thanks to the generous gift of the Class of 2011, Vermont Commons School created a satellite campus this year: a twenty-four foot diameter yurt in Huntington. For almost 15 years, the yurt experience has been a vital part of the Encounter Week program. Just about every graduate has spent a week in the Maple Wind Farm yurts at some point during their VCS career.

The VCS yurt, nestled on a hillside on the Hamilton/Smith family land, overlooks Camels Hump. A new yurt tradition has begun at this stunning location.

Seeing the yurt through from concept to completion was not an easy process. Peter Gilmore’s energy and perseverance helped see the project to fruition, especially in working through all the logistical details. Thanks also go out to the crew of parents and students who worked over the summer to clear the site and build the circular platform. Mark Hamilton, Joe Carrara Sr., Joey Carrara Jr., Will Homer, and Peter Gilmore felled the trees, mixed the concrete, and hauled the lumber. This group took the first big step.

The second and most dramatic phase happened during Fall Encounter Week when Peter Gilmore, student teacher Liam Callahan, and I worked with

a crew of ten students to raise the Yurtle. What a productive and glorious feeling as we watched the walls, roof, supports, and insulation go up! By the second night we were all sprawled out, sleeping on the floor, the first of many, many future groups of students to sleep there. We also managed to dig a deep hole and assemble the Turdle, a swanky outhouse pre-fabricated for us by VCS parent and carpenter, Mark Boudette.

The final phase took place over a weekend in the early winter when a group of students, parents, and faculty built six bunk beds and a kitchen area, and installed the woodstove.

Soon after, the Yurtle kept an Encounter Week group of backcountry skiers happy with blazing fires and starry nights. The group cooked hearty meals over the stove and spent their days skiing on the trails that weave around the yurt. After a long day of fun the students found their mattresses comfortable and the kitchen well stocked. In the Spring, the Yurt was used for the overnight of the All Boys (Chicos) and All Girls (Chicas) Encounter Weeks. The Yurt will serve generations of Encounter Weeks to come as it has in its first seasons of use.



Miles Lamberson, Nick Sears, and Danny Kaufmann

Many thanks, again, to everyone who made this vision a reality. It is a boon to our mission of ecological stewardship and engaging with the world to have this resource!

Madeleine Kunin Talks at VCS Film Screening of Miss Representation

In March, VCS presented a free public screening of the film, *Miss Representation*. Written and directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, the film exposes how mainstream media contribute to the under-representation of women in positions of power and influence in America. The film challenges the media’s limited and often disparaging portrayals of women and girls, which make it difficult for women to achieve leadership positions and for the average woman to feel powerful herself.

VCS invited former Vermont Governor Madeleine Kunin to lead a panel discussion on the topic after the film. Madeleine Kunin was the first woman governor of Vermont, and served as the Deputy Secretary of Education and Ambassador to Switzerland under President Bill Clinton.



Panel: Former VT Governor, Madeleine Kunin, UVM Lecturer in Women’s and Gender Studies Annika Ljung-Baruth, WPTZ TV Anchor, Stephanie Gorin, and Burlington Mayor, Miro Weinberger

New Projects and New Faces in the Development Office

Sarah Judd, Development Director

We had an amazing year in the Development Department! We created our first ever Annual Fund video and song performed by Alum Jonathan Mann. To see the video, go to vermontcommons.org/about-us/giving/. We held our best-attended Grandparents' Day ever in the Fall. We started the tradition of the First Friday Alumni Gathering in January. For our finale, we celebrated our 15th Anniversary on June 6th at the Coach Barn at Shelburne Farms!

I would like to thank everyone who worked on the various Development Department Committees and helped make this year such a success.

Annual Fund This year Encounter Weeks, the World Languages Program, Performing Arts Program, and Financial Aid were all made possible by the Annual Fund. Our success in funding these programs would not have been possible without this year's Annual Fund Chair, Shona Lothrop, and the Annual Fund Class Representatives, Natalie Harder, Tracey Hiatt, Ursula Davila, Lisa Lillibridge, and Jay Strausser. I would also like to thank the amazing Auction Team, Laury Shea, Dinah Larsen, Lisa Lillibridge, Suzanne Mantegna, Ursula Davila, and Shona Lothrop, for making the auction successful and so much fun.

15th Anniversary Party The organization of our 15th Anniversary Party was huge undertaking, and I am so grateful to the Anniversary Committee for their smart ideas, organization, and commitment to making this a memorable event. Thanks to Cara Simone, Mary Hamilton Homer, Elena Hamilton, Ann Janda, Liz Breslend, Heather Moore, Sarah Soule, Peter Goff, and especially to committee members Maggie Homer, Sophie O'Leary, and Ryan Miller for their enthusiasm and for keeping us focused on fun. Special thanks to Tony Bader for his electronic wizardry and to Amy Bernhardt and Leunig's Bistro for their wonderful food and generosity.

Capital Campaign Committee The Capital Campaign Committee worked hard this year to fund improvement projects for our building so that we may enhance the VCS educational experience. Thanks to Chair Jeff Govoni, Kathleen Carrara, Rebecca Coll, Mary Hamilton Homer, Mike Russell, and Peter Gilmore for their devotion to the future of our school.

Development Committee I would like to give special thanks to the Development Committee Chair, Mary Hamilton Homer, for helping to keep all of the plates spinning and for hours of help in so many Development projects. Thanks also to Cara Simone, Rebecca Coll, Peter Gilmore, Shona Lothrop, Ann Janda, and Liz Bresland for serving on the Development Committee.

The Development Office would not be what it is without the help of Adriana Comtois and her tireless hours of work on our database and so many projects and events this year.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone in our community who donated to the Annual Fund, stuffed envelopes, made phone-a-thon calls, made thank-a-thon calls, and showed up to help when we needed you. The commitment of our small community is inspiring, and we accomplish so much with your support.

Please help us reach our Annual Fund goal by making a donation **TODAY!**

www.vermontcommons.org/about-us/giving

15th Anniversary Party at Shelburne Farms



Left to right: Peter Goff, Robert Skiff Jr., Leah Mital Skiff, Cara Simone, and Robert Skiff Sr.



Aaron Voldman, VCS Class of 2005



Left to right: Dyson Lord, Giselle Glaspie, Jill Lamberson, Peter Goff, Paul Lamberson, Miles Lamberson, Gabe Mantegna, and Henry Sadler

Fifteen years ago, Robert Skiff Sr., Robert Skiff Jr., and Leah Mital Skiff founded Vermont Commons School, a place where students could learn about the world by investigating the interconnection between the natural and human environments, on a global level and in their own communities. Beneficiaries of the efforts of these determined visionaries are the high school

graduates and current students whose dreams of a different type of education have been fulfilled.

On June 6, over 300 people joined in celebrating the VCS's 15th anniversary at Shelburne Farms. Aaron Voldman, Class of 2005, and Ruth Heindel, Class of 2006, received the VCS Global Citizen Alumni Award, and 9th-grader Giselle Glaspie won Best Creative Dress.

Board Transitions

The Board of Trustees welcomed three new Board Members this year.

Robert Hill



Bob Hill is a current VCS parent and brings a wealth of experience in educational board work and county planning to the VCS Board. Both of Bob's children, Nora '15 and Mason '17, are thriving at VCS and it is because of this, and the school's amazing and dedicated faculty, that Bob was first motivated to take a leadership role on a VCS committee. The Vermont Commons mission to challenge its students to develop a deep understanding of the world around them and then to fully engage in that community also inspired Bob to join the VCS Board. Bob currently sits on the Finance Committee and the Strategic Finance Pillar Committee.

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Previously, Bob was on the board and served as the Treasurer at The Schoolhouse in South Burlington. Bob also served as the Agricultural Representative on The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and participated in the five-year update to the county's regional plan.

Along with his partner, Laury Shea, Bob has owned and operated Clay Brook Farm, an organic vegetable and flower farm in Jericho for the last fifteen years. Bob graduated with a B.A. in Environmental Science from Colby College and attended the Hotchkiss School. Besides family, Bob's interests are playing guitar, fly-fishing, and The Red Sox/Celtics.

Brian Leffler



Brian Leffler is a current VCS parent of two, Mitchell '14 and Anna '16, and joins the Board

after four years on the IT committee and maintaining the school's computer network.

Brian believes that small is beautiful and that VCS' size allows it to do things that traditional schools cannot and that the teachers really know the students. He feels that the more we can keep small independent schools viable here in Vermont, the more education options we have for our children.

As a member of the VCS Finance Committee Brian feels that the school is in a great position right now. "We need to keep enhancing our academic programs, encouraging more students to enroll, and creating a secure financial foundation for the school. I plan to help in all three of these areas." In addition to the IT Committee and the Finance Committee, Brian is a member to the Site Task Force.

Brian is currently Vice President of Instrumart and lives in Williston with his wife Colleen, a past chair of the parents association (PACS), and their two children. When not working or spending time with his family, Brian is a private pilot and owns part of an airplane which is kept at the Burlington Airport. He received his pilot's license when he was 17.

Derrick Senior



Derrick Senior is the father of VCS student Ryan Senior '16 and brings to the Board experience spear-heading several social/community projects and recently helping bring the "Positive Coaching Alliance" philosophy to Shelburne Little League, where he served on the board and coached for many years.

Derrick is passionate about VCS because of the high academic standards, the culture of respect, experiential learning, community engagement, ecological stewardship, the

faculty/staff, and "the fact that students and almost everyone else in this community, by and large, love this school."

When asked what motivates him to join the VCS Board, he says, "The VCS mission, or parts of it, should be the mission for all schools, in my opinion. Imagine a world of ethical and engaged ecological citizens! I joined the board largely because of the VCS vision statement. I want to leverage my experience by helping the school develop its strategic plan and manifest its vision of becoming a national leader among independent schools."

Derrick put himself through school at Concordia University (Marketing) before moving to Vermont in 1989. Derrick founded several successful companies and brings to the board his passion for continuous improvement, innovation, and culture building. He is an avid tennis player who also likes to road bike and spend time on Lake Champlain. Derrick is currently a member of the Community Engagement Committee. He lives in Shelburne with his wife Deidre and their two children, Ryan and Natalie.

Departing Board Members

We also said goodbye to two pillars of our community. Ken Edwards moved with his family to Louisville, KY after serving almost four years on the Board. Ken was deeply involved in the development of our current Strategic Plan and sat on numerous committees over his four years. Mike Rosen, UVM professor and inventor extraordinaire, served for three years on the Board as a community liaison and member of the Strategic Planning Committee.

Both Ken and Mike brought wisdom, intelligence, humor, and insight to their years of service at VCS. They will be deeply missed.



Vermont Commons School Class of 2012

Front: Adam Coll, Willie Strausser,
Eliot Crawford, Alexandra Ackert-Smith,
Alexis Jackson, Sarah Mueller,
Justine Magowan, Mae Kemsley,
Phineas Schlossberg
Back: Elsa Hollyer, Timothy Sears,
Leslie Gadway, Joshua Minot, Christian Frey,
Joseph Carrara, Milo Self, Nate Jaffe



VCS Celebrates its 15th Graduation

On June 8, this group of VCS students gathered together to begin a day-long celebration. During the graduation ceremony, awards were given for academic excellence and community contributions. The ceremony was followed by a picnic luncheon with friends and family.

We celebrate the Vermont Commons School

Class of 2012 as they pursue higher education. This year's graduating class was awarded 1,230,000 million dollars in merit based aid from the colleges and universities offering them admission. The merit awards were based on their academic records and commitment to community service.

In the Fall, the Vermont Commons Class of 2012 Will Attend:

Acadia University, NS
Beloit College, WI
Colby College, ME
College of Wooster, OH
Cornell University, NY
Grinnell College, IA
Hampshire College, MA (2)
Mount Holyoke College, MA

St. Michael's College, VT
Tulane University, LA
Union College, NY
University of British Columbia, BC
University of Colorado at Boulder, CO
University of Denver, CO
University of Redlands, CA
University of Vermont, VT



Back: Josh Minot and Phineas Schlossberg Front: Justine Magowan, Sarah Mueller, and Tim Sears



Class President Willie Strausser spoke on behalf of the graduates



Adam Coll, Christian Frey, and Elsa Hollyer

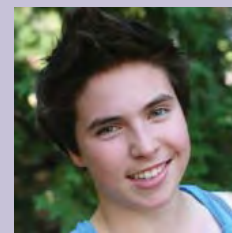


Mae Kemsley, Christian Frey, Eliot Crawford, Phineas Schlossberg, Josh Minot, Justine Magowan, Leslie Gadway, Joseph Carrara, Sarah Mueller, Nate Jaffe, Tim Sears, Alexis Jackson, Elsa Hollyer, Milo Self, Adam Coll, Alexander Ackert-Smith, and Willie Strausser

Lex Jackson, a VCS Senior, was accepted into Colby College in Waterville, Maine. Congratulations, Lex, from all of us at VCS! Please read her essay featured below:

Community Coloring

Lex Jackson



“Come help me buy a rainbow,” I beckoned down the hall. Jonah turned and strutted up to me. With our short, spiky hairstyles side by side, we stood out as fearless

teenagers.

“I cut my hair because I wanted to look like you,” he admitted, laughing. I had just cut off all of my hair because I wanted to feel like myself. My dad had told me he didn't want me to cut it because he wanted me to be beautiful. My mom had suggested that perhaps I was a ‘dyke.’

“What do you mean, ‘buying rainbows?’” Jonah asked, puzzled.

“I'm putting up ‘safe space’ signs around the school, so that people know this is an accepting environment for anyone queer or questioning. The school doesn't really acknowledge the existence of homosexuality; I'm going to fix that,” I took a breath, “but first, I need to choose a design to print out.”

Ten minutes later, we decided to craft our own designs. As I carried the black outline of our school mascot to the copier, I ran into two of my teachers and gave them my ‘safe space’ spiel. The light in their eyes caught me off guard. They quickly praised me, expressed their support, and rushed off, chatting in whispers. Their positive encouragement only further stretched the grin on my face.

With thirty warm copies in my hand and a bounce in my stride, I took off down the hallway. This time, I was recruiting. I shortened my spiel and recited it to anyone I came across as I waltzed down to the studio in search of Crayola markers. By the time I reached the computer lab and laid the blank outlines and rainbow-colored markers on the table, I had a following of fifteen or twenty seventh-through-twelfth-graders, eager to improve our school. I didn't know whether they supported me personally or the entire gay-rights movement, but it didn't matter.

Talking in voices too excited to be hushed, we colored rainbow turtles until our lunch period was over. Our turtles were more diverse than the entire state of Vermont. As I cleaned up and said goodbye to the friends who had just earned my respect, touched my heart, and made me feel more secure than I did in my own household, I felt the pride bursting inside of me like never before.

Weeks later, our eighth-grade chess champion noticed a rainbow-free room and asked me for a blank turtle so he could make another sign. As he was putting up that sign, the school was purchasing a banner describing the VCS experience. When I saw the words “safe space” on that banner, I realized the community appreciation of our efforts. That month, I learned that people will surprise you if you give them the chance, that large emotional investments often lead to great pay-offs, and that for the rest of my life, I was never again going to let anything hold me back from being me.



Alumni Class Representatives

- Mary CottonClasses of 1998-2001
- Volunteer Needed!**..... ..Classes of 2002-2004
- Kyler Robinson.....Classes of 2005-2007
- Carly Lagasse..... Classes of 2008-2010

Class of 2000

Mary Cotton

I am still at the Stern Center for Language and Learning as an Speech Language Pathologist. I am happy to report that my long-time partner, Jen, and I will be getting married this summer!

Class of 2003

Naomi Heindel

I am getting a Masters of Environmental Science degree, 2013, from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

Class of 2008

Kelsey Boudette

From Jennifer Molnar Boudette via Facebook:
 “Kelsey Boudette, VCS 2008, will graduate from UVM on May 12th with a B.S. in Environmental Sciences, Concentration in Water Resources. Kelsey will tell you that it was those years of working in Bartlett Brook that led directly to her path of study.”

Julia Cox

I just graduated from Skidmore College with a Bachelor of Science in Music and Studio Art! I am living in Saratoga Springs, NY for the next year interning with Emma Dodge Hanson, a local photographer, and hosting at Wheatfields!

Class of 2009

Carly Lagasse

Nursing is going really well! I took me a little while to get in a groove, but now I'm really enjoying it. I have one four hour clinical per week this semester at a nursing home in Rutland, and next semester I will have a 7 hour clinical in a medical surgical unit.

Class of 2010

Elena Mudd

I recently traveled to Africa to volunteer on a lion conservation project. I spent every day with the wild lions photographing them to help spread awareness about the dire situation African Lions are in today. The Panthera Leo are threatened by habitat and prey loss, trophy hunting, disease, inbreeding, and human conflict. It is hard to know for sure but it is believed by most conservation studies that the African Lion has declined by at least 30% in the last two decades. To learn more, visit lionalert.org. Over the summer I will be in Vermont working and hopefully interning with Hope Works on some video and photography projects. I am going back to NYU in the fall but in the Gallatin program where I can design my own concentration/major. I'm leaning towards photography and activism.

Josie Stout

I just graduated from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, and I will be starting medical school at UVM in the fall.

Former Teachers

Hanna McNeill (formerly Nelson)

My husband James just finished his PhD in engineering and got a great new job as a sustainability consultant in Madison, WI. We will be moving there this summer!



Devin De Burlo, Andrew Dean, and Catie Mueller at the First Friday Alumni Gathering last January

To be included in the next Class Notes, contact :
 Sarah Judd at sjudd@vermontcommons.org

Farewell to Science Teacher and VCS Alumna Ruth Heindel ('06)

Peter Goff, Science Chair



Ruth in 9th grade on Dix Mountain trip

I first met VCS student Ruth Heindel at the dawn of the new millennium. One of the things that made me hesitate in accepting Bob Skiff's offer of a job at VCS was the fear that I would stagnate and that my development as a professional would stop after teaching the same courses over and over again. However, during one of my very first classes with young Ruthie, I realized that I was in for a lot of fun and was about to be challenged consistently to push myself as a teacher.

In that memorable class, Ruthie challenged my definition of the term hypothesis, but she did it at a philosophical level. We eventually agreed to disagree, but her willingness to speak her mind with well-thought-out eloquence and confidence would remain unchanged throughout her career.

We define a Naturalist as "...a scientist who understands the environment and one's place within that system. A Naturalist will be able to use the scientific method to identify the



Ruth in 12th grade, arctic research in Churchill

keystone questions within a particular system, answer them thoughtfully, and then act upon the new knowledge." Throughout her career, Ruth defined what a VCS Naturalist would be. Whether bushwhacking on Dix Mountain, shepherding her fainting lab partner through dissections, helping classmates through field research, or eventually spending time in the Arctic as a part of a research team, Ruth became the model of what our curriculum strives to produce. Over the course of her tenure, she earned the departmental award in Science three times (in addition to the Math award and the Language Arts award twice). Her remarkable academic success was complemented by her work in the community.

Naomi's Little Sister (NLS), a.k.a. Ruthie, a.k.a. Ruth, became 'Roof' on the fledgling Flying Turtles Volleyball team. Again, her focus and

determination paid dividends to herself and her team as she went on to captain the team and earn an award for her leadership. In addition, her artistic strengths also strengthened the community, on the cello, in multiple school productions, and in the art studio. Her Living Vermont field journals remain the teaching standard for every generation of 8th-graders. Our goals of preparing a naturalist for college were perfectly realized at Ruth's graduation, and it was a very bittersweet moment when we collectively realized what she had meant to this community, balanced with our pride in her accomplishments and our expectations for her impact on the world as she set out for Brown University. With the possible exception of her parents, Judy and Craig, no one was happier than I was when she came back to VCS four years later.



Ruth in 2010 teaching Living Vermont at ECHO

The best classes I've ever taught have been team-taught efforts, and having the opportunity to co-teach the Living Vermont and Geology of Vermont classes with Ruth was, literally, one of the highlights of my career. Her perspective, from both sides of the curriculum, was absolutely invaluable. Ruth's participation in our Science Department retreat will improve our curriculum for every future VCS student. I am absolutely certain that Ruth has taught me as much about teaching, coaching, and being a part of a community as we've collectively taught her. At this year's graduation, while sitting on the stage as a faculty member, Ruth was awarded the school's fourth Naturalist Certificate. Her life-long contribution to her community is an inspiration to all budding naturalists.

Ruth is leaving VCS because she has enrolled in a PhD program in the Dartmouth Earth Sciences Department, to pursue her interest in arctic geology. In addition to her acceptance into the Earth Sciences Department, she has received an IGERT (Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship) Fellowship to be part of Dartmouth's Polar Environmental Change program. The program will allow her to research glacial history and landscape evolution in Greenland, while considering the social impacts of climate change in the arctic and effective methods of science communication.

Thank you NLS/Ruthie/Roof/Ruth, good luck at Dartmouth...come back soon and frequently!



NEASC Accreditation - 15 Years of Our Journey Affirmed

Cara Simone, Academic Dean

As I walked into the lunchroom on a Sunday last October, I watched the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Visiting Committee mingle with students, faculty, board members, and parents before sitting down to a mouth-watering potluck dinner. Conversation, a delicious meal, and student-led tours of our recently renovated facility were the order of the night.

This potluck dinner kicked off the Visiting Committee's three-day visit. However, for the faculty, it was the culmination of almost two years of planning, meetings, and writing and rewriting our NEASC Self-Study. Each member of our faculty served on at least two committees, and each committee produced a report on a Standard set forth by NEASC. The faculty devoted an extraordinary amount of time examining our entire institution; no stone was left unturned as they looked to maintain what was already great at Vermont Commons School and plan for further improvement in the future.

What were some areas that were already great? Our mutual respect for one another, our level of engagement within and outside our community, our active and supportive Board of Trustees, our consistent focus on our mission, and our teachers, who are excited to share their knowledge and love of learning through an applied curriculum were all positives. What were some areas that needed improvement? We identified the need for more professional development and an evaluation system, more vehicles to improve extra-curriculars and transportation to and from school, and an enhanced PE and arts program.

When James Mooney of NEASC came to

visit and meet with the faculty, he assured us that we did not have to wait for the Visiting Committee's final report to start addressing the recommendations of each Self-Study. So, we started. We traded out our Sprinter and purchased two Multi-Function School Activity Buses. We appointed a committee to convene during the summer to make recommendations for an evaluation system. We reviewed our Health & Safety Standards, and we organized and upgraded our facility and practices. And the work continues. Despite the many hats each of us wears at VCS, the faculty remains committed to improvement both as teachers and as



Board Chair Rebecca Coll, Former NEASC Commission Member Russell deBurlo, Founder Bob Skiff, Academic Dean Cara Simone, Head of School Peter Gilmore

stewards of the Vermont Commons School. Over the course of the next three days, the Visiting Committee got to know our students, faculty, and facility. They noted the depth and honesty of the report, the passion of the faculty and their level of engagement, and students' pride in their school.

For 15 years, this spirit has persisted. For 15 years, students have been challenged to think critically about the arts, the sciences, the humanities, and the world around them. For 15 years, Vermont Commons School has remained true to its mission while looking ahead and trying to project what's around the bend. It was incredibly gratifying to hear that this came across in our Self-Study. Perhaps even more moving was attending the NEASC Accreditation luncheon with our founder, Bob Skiff, our current Head of School, Peter Gilmore, and our Chair of the Board, Rebecca Coll. As Bob Skiff always said, it's a journey, not a race. The potluck dinner wasn't the end of the journey. It was just another stop along the way that affirmed our purpose.

VCS Plans the Future of Community Engagement at Retreat



Back Row: Board Chair Rebecca Coll, Melanie Goodman, Martha Maksym, Lee McIsaac, and Christie Beveridge Middle: Head of School Peter Gilmore, and Mark Cline Lucey Front Row: Katiya Boudette, Nora Hill, Miles Lamberson, Nick Sears, Bradley Materick, and Derrick Senior

VCS to Teach Big History Next Year

Cara Simone, Academic Dean

Vermont Commons School is one of 50 schools in the U.S. chosen to pilot Bill Gates and David Christian's program, Big History and the first middle school to offer the course.

The object of the course is to pack the history of the universe into one year of study. Big History weaves evidence and insights from many scientific and historical disciplines across 13.7 billion years into a single, accessible origin story: one that explores who we are, how we got here, how we are connected to everything around us, and where we may be heading.

According to Social Studies Instructor Heather Moore who spear headed this program, "Our 8th grade students will leave their year of Social Studies with a sweeping grasp of the history of the universe, understanding both scientific and historical patterns through time."

The Big History Project LLC (BHP) is focused on bringing this unique learning experience to life for high school students in the 9th or 10th grade. However, Vermont Commons School will be the first school in the U.S. to offer the course to 8th graders.

BHP is sponsored by Bill Gates separately from his work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Big History concept arose from a desire to go beyond the specialized and self-contained fields that emerged in the 20th century and grasp history as a whole, looking for common themes across the entire time scale of history.

At its core, Big History addresses the issue of sustainability by exploring the ongoing capacity of the Earth to maintain life and by encouraging students to develop ideas about how to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Science Instructor Peter Goff notes, "Big History brings science and history together along with different areas of knowledge into one unified story. This story provides students with a deeper awareness of where we are at this moment in time, better preparing them to help shape the future of our fragile planet."

UVM Calculus Class Comes to VCS

Peter Gilmore, Head of School

Starting next year, VCS faculty will teach side by side with UVM professors on our campus and during our regular schedule to provide a college level, top quality, four credit calculus course to our juniors and seniors.

One semester of calculus will be taught over the course of one year at VCS, allowing our students to experience college level work at their own pace, and earn credit that is transferrable to virtually any college in the United States. In exchange, the course will become a laboratory for teaching methodologies in both institutions and create a bond between the faculties with a common goal of teaching high level topics in an exciting way. After the pilot program next year, we hope to spread this opportunity to other disciplines and other faculty as well.

VCS students can now show every college they apply to that they can succeed at this level, and are ready for this type of challenge. In addition, they can apply these credits to complete their degrees or majors sooner.





Thoughts in Common

Peter B. Gilmore
Head of School

THE STATE OF THE SCHOOL

(Continued from pg. 1)

All of this speaks to the careful planning and management by the Trustees, the Finance Committee, and the Business Manager.

Another positive result of financial stability is our relationship with banks and lenders. One previous loan was retired at the outset of our fiscal year, which proved that we could generate regular payments and perhaps borrow in the future if necessary. The two new VCS buses purchased last year were financed with a special low interest rate awarded to us, and a third bus this year will come on the heels of our steady payment of the previous loan. A line of credit with our local lender was also established this year (only for emergencies), and remains as a safety net if needed in the future. All in all, our relationship with banks and lenders has never been stronger.

Our good financial condition has allowed us to enjoy a number of benefits that

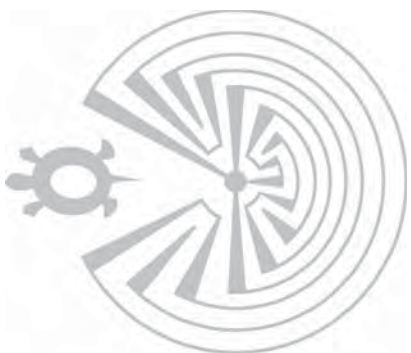
also speak to the strong state of our school. Each of the major institutional organizations we have joined over the past two years have required we offer our books to be reviewed, we show to be financially sound, and we afford the dues of membership. We became members of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) after an extensive process, which in part required our audited financials to be submitted. Likewise, the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England (ISANNE), which we joined last year and is made up of many schools like ours, also required that we submit proof of our financial viability. Finally, our acceptance into the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), which occurred this past January, required that the audited financials be sent as part of the application as well. Our participation in each of these august organizations would simply not have been possible without our recent financial stability. Each membership speaks to our viability as an institution and our acceptance into the realm of established schools and colleges in the United States.

What this means is that VCS is steadily building the firm foundation it requires to be here in the long run. There has never been a guarantee that new independent schools will survive the tough years starting out, but we have deep roots in Vermont, and those can help insure that we will thrive financially in years ahead. The good news is that we have passed a number of important milestones, and we continue to grow stronger each and every year. With persistent good oversight, prudent management, and the help of everyone in the community, we can and will do this I am certain.



VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL
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OUR MISSION

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