

# Vermont Commons School Curriculum

**Scholarship. Community. Global Responsibility.**

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students,

Vermont Commons School's curriculum utilizes collaborative, hands-on, and field-based teaching methodologies to develop and inspire intellectualism, practical skills, and 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 interconnectedly, understand Social Studies in the context of global history, and immerse themselves in World Languages through story, cultural study, and international exchange. They pursue a range of elective 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. This curricular approach and our small class sizes allow for creativity and collaboration. Vermont Commons students grow into critical and innovative thinkers, able to engage the challenges and opportunities they encounter in the world and seek means to sustain it and improve the lives of its people.

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, connect, and collaborate with their students, 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 Easter  
Assistant Head of School

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **ACADEMIC INFORMATION**

[Courses and Programs](#)

[Coursework Requirements](#)

[Advanced Academic Opportunities](#)

[Academic Support](#)

[College Counseling Program](#)

### **COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

[English Department](#)

[Mathematics Department](#)

[Science Department](#)

[Social Studies Department](#)

[Arts Department](#)

[Electives Department](#)

[World Languages Department](#)

[Encounter Week Program](#)

[Senior Project Program](#)

[Wellness](#)

[Extracurricular Sports](#)

[Faculty and Staff](#)

## **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 includes arts and 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 and the Arts by enrolling in courses in every discipline every year. In the rare circumstance that a student has accelerated in Math by successfully completing Calculus 1 by the end of Junior year (or earlier), they are not required to be enrolled for credit in a math course thereafter in order to graduate. Older students who utilize the Flexible Curriculum policy, may have some requirements replaced. VCS also requires that high school students participate each year in at least three hours a week of Elective/Arts courses (averaged over two semesters) as well as three Encounter Weeks, and complete one elective in Health. Middle school students participate in an Arts course each semester as well as three Encounter Weeks, the Health 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. The *Flexible Curriculum Policy* allows juniors and seniors the opportunity to apply to the Department Chairs Committee to pursue limited off-campus study of a course in lieu of one of their academic courses per semester at Vermont Commons. For students of rare motivation and academic drive, the school offers an *Advanced Diploma Certification Program*. Begun prior to senior year, the special diploma certificate program 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 may 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 Counselor routinely visits campuses in order to promote Vermont Commons and gather information to share with families. A listing of colleges offering admission to our graduates can be found on the school's website.

# COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

## ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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

The literature that students study is organized by themes that reflect and explore relationships between people and their environment. Students read canonical and contemporary texts from a variety of genres (novels, essays, plays, short stories, and poetry), 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.

### **Introductory English Sampler: Reading, Creative Writing, and Critical Thinking**

#### *6th grade*

This class is centered around cultivating a love for reading as well as an introduction to creative writing, analytical writing, and critical thinking. Our goal in this class is to read, read, read, and throw in a dash of writing and conversation. We start the year discussing the book that many of you read over the summer. Throughout the semester, we will collectively read and discuss several books, including *Harriet the Spy*, by Louise Fitzhugh, *Ghosts* by Raina Telgemeier, *Hurricane Child* by Kacen Callender, and *I Was Their American Dream*, by Malaka Gharib. Throughout the year, students are also encouraged to choose their own books for independent reading. We keep reading logs, as well as physical notebooks in which everyone is encouraged to experiment and respond creatively to their readings, and these can include both doodles and text. During our classes together, we read individually, write, and talk. We also take time to develop our storytelling and creative writing skills, and work on a few basic grammar tools to help prepare 6th graders for their future English classes.

### **Place and Identity**

#### *7th Grade*

Seventh Grade English focuses on helping students become highly competent and confident readers and writers. This year, students begin to look at the strategies authors use to construct meaning. They notice these strategies in poetry, short stories, essays, and novels, and they practice them in their own writing. Students write creatively, analytically, and persuasively, and are expected to keep up with their independent reading throughout the year. This is also the year when students master the 8 parts of speech, and start to see words and sentences as tools they can manipulate. Some of the themes for the year include how the environment affects identity and how writers use words to

promote justice. Texts that have been read in this class recently include *The Outsiders*, *Before We Were Free*, *Call of the Wild*, *MARCH*, *Echo Mountain*, *Out of My Mind*, and *Ghost*.

## **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 57 Bus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The House on Mango Street*. To foster a love for reading, we also have free reading units. This class includes a unit on constructing an argument. After students learn the essential aspects of persuasive writing, they write their own text-based argument. Students also participate in Vermont's Poetry Out Loud to improve public speaking skills. With a focus on the use of poetic devices, they teach a poem to the class and compose their own poems. Over the course of the year, students write creatively and formally. This class advances students' vocabularies, improves their writing capacities, and helps them think critically and creatively about values and beliefs.

## **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 wilderness, travels into our memories, as well as 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 *Persepolis*, *Into the Wild*, and *Things Fall Apart*. Students also pursue independent reading. To practice presentation skills, students participate in Vermont's Poetry Out Loud competition. Students craft analytical essays, short stories, and poetry, as well as 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.

## **Rhetorical Analysis and Social Commentary**

### *10th Grade*

English 10 focuses on rhetorical analysis and social commentary. We use a variety of texts to examine the strategies authors use to write persuasively and to effect change. Students read closely, identifying writers' tools; they analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate poetry, drama, novels, and nonfiction. Each of our assignments 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 course which teaches students to develop evidence based arguments and essays. Texts that are read together in the 10th grade may include *The Jungle*, *The River Between*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Other Wes Moore*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Hillbilly Elegy*.

## **Critical Theory**

### *11th Grade*

Students in this course practice applying different literary theories to classical and contemporary texts, as well as to popular media. 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, *Using Critical Theory*, 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, Marxism, queer theory, postcolonial criticism, and African-American studies. Literary texts include *Beloved*, *Hamlet*, *Dilemma of a Ghost*, and a wide selection of short stories and poems. Another goal of the class is to use theory to understand ourselves and the world around us. To this end, students apply theories to television shows, advertisements, films, song lyrics, and video games. In addition to several analytical writing assignments, students craft texts of their own, including short stories, poems, and personal essays. Students participate in Harkness discussions and design their own production of *Hamlet*. This course prepares students for the work they will do in their 12th grade English class, Single Author Study.

### **Single Author Study**

#### *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 and use it 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, creating an annotated bibliography, and producing a college-level thesis paper. In addition, students write an author imitation and become expert editors.

### **The Memoir**

#### *12th Grade Spring Semester*

In Memoir class, we read, listen to, and study memoirs from a variety of authors, and students compose their own memoirs using some of the techniques they learn from the professionals. Some of the professional memoirs we read include those by Patti Smith, Richard Wright, Annie Dillard, Joy Harjo, Wes Moore, J.D. Vance, David Sedaris, Michelle Zauner, Asha Bandele, and Jennifer Finney Boylan. We experiment with different purposes, points of view, tones, moods, and formats. A strong emphasis is placed on writing with specifics, vivid descriptions, realistic dialogue, and emotional responses to situations. Writing prompts and exercises culminate in a final project consisting of a creative cover, a table of contents, an introduction, and at least 16 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**

#### *6<sup>th</sup> Grade*

The 6<sup>th</sup> 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, and that documenting thinking is essential to success. While 6<sup>th</sup> 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 with 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 sampling methods and probability to gather student-generated data to interpret patterns.

### **Math 2: Beginning Algebra & Similarity/Dilation Transformation**

This course provides more foundational understanding for the branches of mathematics. Students begin the year with study of geometric transformation including 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 begins next as students 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 with a comprehensive algebraic review involving factoring trinomials, literal equations, and 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.

### **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 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.

### **Statistics**

*Prerequisite: Math 4 or pre-calculus*

*Recommended for seniors*

*Only occasionally offered*

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 (recommended to have a grade of 80% or higher)*

In the first semester, students explore function manipulation, specifically looking at the behavior of parent functions from Math 4 and add in piecewise, composite, and an in-depth study of inverse functions. Next, students study Polynomial Functions, their corresponding algebra, and sketch accurate graphs of them. Second semester starts off with a unit on Rational Functions and a brief review of Radical Functions. The next unit is on Unit Circle trigonometry (sine, cosine, tangent, secant, cosecant, and cotangent) and the use of this knowledge as it applies to trigonometric proofs and modeling. From here, we move away from our study of functions, to wrap up the year exploring Conic Sections, analyzing and comparing their graphs, and why they behave the way they do from an algebraic perspective.

## **Calculus**

*Prerequisite: Pre-calculus (recommended to have 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. 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 is broken into two parts: the first part of the year is dedicated to the physical sciences (primarily topics in chemistry, physics, and engineering), this is then followed by an introduction to ecological sciences. Much of the first semester curriculum is adapted from a program called Foundational Approaches in Science Teaching (FAST). FAST emphasizes hands-on experiences through which students discover important science concepts and develop laboratory and thinking skills, therefore much of class time is spent performing and discussing laboratory experiments. The 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 more than 100 local animals and plants from sight/sound. Field journals are the backbone of the course; every organism we encounter is recorded in this journal. Classes are held in the field regularly.

## **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. In this semester-long course students examine the history of the scientific process as well as study and repeat famous science experiments. In addition, students learn to apply the scientific method as they complete investigations in multiple disciplines and 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. 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. 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 half of this class focuses on cellular processes, especially with respect to protein synthesis, metabolism, and genetics. Building on their chemistry experience, students learn the basics of organic chemistry while focusing on the processes of photosynthesis and cellular respiration. Labs include examinations of genetics, osmosis, and microscopy. The second half is devoted to comparative anatomy of animals. A systems-based approach reveals 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 half 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 lab experiments to let students 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 quantitative description of 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 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 of 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 interacting 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 with chemical reactions that occur with everyday materials, to develop student skills in stoichiometry and related calculations that are essential to the quantitative practice 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 which chemical changes take place spontaneously.

## **Electives**

### *12th Grade*

In the senior year, students vote to select one of their science electives. Most electives are semester long. Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, one of these electives will be Environmental Science to reflect the needs of our time. Some offerings may include:

#### **Elective: Environmental Science**

Environmental science is, perhaps, the most important scientific discipline in today's world. The impact that humans are having on the environment is increasing and potentially catastrophic. In order to fulfill a core tenet of our school's mission, to create globally responsible citizens, the Science Department believes every student needs to understand these impacts and learn how to help. The curriculum is taught at a high level and is based around a series of laboratory experiments. Major topics include population growth, air pollution, modern agriculture, biodiversity, and more. Multiple field trips help to deepen understanding of the concepts.

#### **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 half of the semester 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 grade. The second half of the semester 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 semester, all students participate in a narrated demonstration of animal courtship rituals or predatory behaviors, and perform them for the VCS community. Throughout the course, 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 course. We begin with a 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 phylogenetic 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 perspective, 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**

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 semester, we also examine/relitigate famous cases from criminal history 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 begins 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 the ways in which modern imaging methods enable cutting-edge research into brain function. Utilizing their understanding of healthy nervous system function, students individually choose a neurological disease to study in detail, exploring both the causes and consequences of the disease.

**Elective: Space Science**

In this course students explore the universe through a variety of academic disciplines: astronomy, planetary science, cosmology, history, and astrophysics. Major topics may include the creation of the universe and Earth's place in it, a history of space exploration, astronomical bodies (stars, black

holes, etc.), and the search for extraterrestrial life. Students will complete a series of activities, major projects, and, possibly, field trips, to gain a deeper understanding of major concepts.

### **Elective: Physical Geology**

This course focuses on the structure and composition of the Earth and the processes that alter it. Why learn about that? The physical Earth and the forces that shape it provide the foundation for life, are incredibly powerful and dynamic, and yet most people rarely give them a second thought. Major topics of the class may include plate tectonics, volcanism, rock and mineral identification, glaciology, and earthquakes. Field trips and laboratory activities will play a key part in the learning process.

## **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 consider their identities and sense of belonging as they understand choice and power in recent American history. The eighth through tenth grades take the long view of human history from ancient through modern times, always connecting the past to today, with a particular focus on regions outside America and Europe. Eleventh and twelfth grade students choose from a variety of fall semester-long elective courses. In the spring all eleventh graders take Modern United States History and all twelfth graders take a course studying the history and modern role of race in America.

### **Local Citizenship, Global Responsibility**

#### *6th Grade*

6th Grade Social Studies is an introductory civics course at heart as we look closely at the workings of various communities through place-based learning that emphasizes student choice in the topics of study and forms of demonstrating learning. We study the landscape, history, people and idea of Vermont, from its first inhabitants to its current population. In this interdisciplinary course, students work on creative and formal writing, critical thinking, and oral communication skills. Students track their work by maintaining a year-long portfolio that allows for choice and encourages trying new forms of writing and expression. Daily routines emphasize the core organizational habits of being a successful student, and our routines also focus on practice of grammar, mechanics, and persuasive writing.

### **Identity, Belonging, and Community**

#### *7th Grade*



In this course students explore how the communities and places to which we belong, and the time in which we live, can influence our identities and the choices available to us. Students delve into these questions of membership and belonging by tracing the history of segregation in the United States and its social, legal, and political consequences. The course then moves to the present day as students apply what they have learned about identity, belonging, and community to the topic of immigration from Central America, both through reading a realistic fiction text and engaging with local community partners. We end the year studying indigenous American experiences and finally, students engage in local projects to help create a welcoming community that offers membership to every person regardless of race, gender, religion, or nationality.

### **Empires, Networks & Beliefs through 1500 CE**

#### *8th Grade*

This course explores the global maturing of complex human civilizations, belief systems and the growth of human networks of exchange. Through exploration of historical topics ranging from the Islamic empires through medieval Europe, this class challenges students to think critically and formulate investigative questions. Throughout the year, students are fully supported in the skills and steps of producing a major research project on a 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 the rise of representative government during the Age of Revolutions (American, French, Haitian), and U.S. civics. During the first semester students write a 6-9 page research paper on an historical development of their choosing, and during the second semester they engage in a major video production on a topic of historical significance.

### **Rise Of The Modern World - 1750--present**

#### *10th Grade*

This class looks at the period 1750 to the present as the radical transformation of human societies due to the Industrial Revolution, the rise of nationalism, and the spread of imperialism. The course is globally focused, covering the liberal and national revolutions of the 18th and 19th century, the causes and impacts of industrialization and deindustrialization globally, the ideologies and technologies that drove imperial mindsets and colonial practices, the forces that led to the destruction and recreation of the two World Wars, and the lingering impacts of the Cold War on our world today. We use the OER Project's "World History Project - 1750 to the Present" for the

majority of our course materials and our work focuses on building skills of sourcing, analyzing change and continuity over time, and building arguments about cause-and-effect across the globe and over time.

### **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.

### **Race and The Legacy of Racial Slavery in America**

*12th Grade, Spring Semester*

This course is designed as a capstone to the student experience of history and social studies at Vermont Commons. In our brief time together, we investigate many critical events in American history through the lens of race. We use primary sources, scholarly articles, and various forms of historical analysis to understand the way that European colonization of the Americas created a racialized hierarchy that continues to divide and define the United States today. We focus specifically on the experience of indigenous people of the Americas, enslaved Africans and their descendants, Mexicans-Americans, and immigrants from Ireland, China, Japan, and Jewish people from Eastern Europe, though there will be room for independent exploration of other topics. The course calls on knowledge from earlier social studies classes, weaving this knowledge together to build a stronger understanding of political and social conditions in America today.

### **Electives, Fall Semester**

*11th and 12th Grade Fall Semester*

*For the Fall 2023 semester, 10th Graders are also eligible for these courses*

Students have a choice between 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 past offerings have included:

### **Elective: The Vote: 2020**

Here you are, on the cusp of being a voter (or maybe you already are!), in one of the most momentous times in our country's history. As you, your family, your friends, and your neighbors head to the polls in November, you'll be taking part in one of the greatest traditions and duties of

citizenship. And yet, it's a tradition with a fraught and contested history, which tells us critical truths about who those in power see as fully American. In this course, we track the actual 2020 Presidential Election, looking at polling, media coverage, strategy, and developing news as it happens. When the election ends and votes begin to be counted, we take a step back, and learn about the philosophical roots and political history of the executive branch. And throughout, we wrestle with the history and current status of voter enfranchisement and maybe more critically, disenfranchisement, asking who controls the right to vote, how the distribution and withholding of that right reflects who is considered American, and who is left out of our national decision-making.

### **Elective: Environmental Economics**

We need economics because that's how we make and get all the stuff we humans need, right? But we also need a thriving planet because, well, it's the only home we've got. So what happens when our economic systems say, "Grow, grow! To infinity and beyond!" and Earth says, "Ouch! Yer killin' me, here!"? Can we have endless growth on a finite planet? And - let's get deep here - is all this growth even making us humans happier? Should human happiness and planetary sustainability be economic priorities? What would that even look like? Through our exploration of the burgeoning field of Ecological Economics we explore a wide range of issues this semester including: capitalism, climate change & natural resource depletion, the American Dream, individualism & personal freedom, social responsibility, happiness & wellbeing, community & neighborliness, wealth inequality, debt & consumerism, and much, much more.

### **Elective: #RESIST**

While our current political moment seems to brim over with examples of political and social resistance, these forces are nothing new and have deep roots in the understanding of what it means to be a citizen. In this course, we focus on two central themes: the philosophical roots of political and social resistance movements, and then the tactics that movements across the political spectrum have used to pursue their goals for change. We ask how those who engage in social movements justify their actions within the framework of the social contract and the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. We also consider how a range of tactical choices, from pursuing social change through the court system to non-violent resistance to extra-legal sabotage and direct action, have led to either the success or failure of movements. After a study of some of the most prominent thinkers in the field of political rights and resistance, we will move into comparative studies of various movements. Our goal will not necessarily be to debate the merits of any of these movements or actors, but to understand both their justifications of action and tactical choices. The course is heavily discussion-based and assessments involve group projects, short essays, a student-taught class on a current social movement and a culminating study of a resistance movement, past or present, of each student's choosing.

### **Elective: Current Events, Engaging with a Complex World**

You feel overwhelmed by the daily news. You know the things that are happening in the US and around the world are important - critical to your life and your future, but there are so many of them, and they are so complex, and . . . you're not alone. Most people feel this way. This course gives us time to start to try to wrap our brains around the forces and events shaping our time. From the rise of China, to the transformation of Russia. From US policy toward the Middle East to Iran to Afghanistan, and all the way over to North Korea. From climate disruption to nuclear destruction. Here in the USA: from immigration policy to health care policy. And, of course, there will be all the news that will pop up throughout the semester that we cannot predict, but that we will tackle. We will have discussions and debates. We will explore multiple perspectives on issues, and learn to assess media sources. We will ask how history has shaped these current realities. You will have the opportunity to dive deep into a particular current issue of your choosing, to research and analyze it in depth throughout the semester. And in the end you will come away with a couple of answers, loads of questions, and the toolkit to be an active, engaged, informed citizen throughout the rest of your life.

### **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 will 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: 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: 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.

### **Elective: Law and Order**

This course will be an overview of the philosophical roots of law and the rule of law in the United States, a practical exploration of criminal and constitutional law in modern American life, and an investigation of current issues in criminal and constitutional law. The course will be interactive and experiential, as we will center our study around actual cases, decision making, and a mock trials and moot court. Students will have several opportunities for individual investigation of areas of their own interest and choosing. We will focus on polishing skills of logical thinking and argumentation, as well as formal academic writing.

### **Elective: Decolonization to Globalization**

The second half of the twentieth century was largely defined by two inter-related and inter-twined forces - the Cold War conflict between the USA and the USSR and the emergence of a newly decolonized and independent Third World. While we might imagine the consequences of colonization and global ideological battles to be far behind us, just a small scratch at the surface of current events shows that these forces are far from being distant past. It will be our goal, in this course, to understand current global context and events through the lens of colonization, decolonization and the Cold War. We will ask, as Robert McMahon does in his introduction to *The Cold War in the Third World*, the degree to which the modern day political, social and economic successes and struggles in once-colonized countries can be attributed to the galvanizing role of decolonization during the Cold War.

## **ARTS DEPARTMENT**

The Arts Department at Vermont Commons School offers courses in visual and performing arts, focusing on both technical skill and artistic expression. Students analyze works from a diverse background of artists as they explore art's connection to culture, community, and social justice. Any students working toward art school or conservatory will have access to rigorous technical training and opportunities to build a cohesive portfolio. All students develop their creative problem-solving skills through a variety of artistic mediums. All middle school students are required to enroll in at least one Arts course per semester. At the high school level, students can take Arts courses as a way to fulfill their Elective course requirements. (See High School Electives offerings below)

### **MIDDLE SCHOOL**

#### **Art Foundations**

##### *6th Grade Semester Course*

The class focuses on developing creativity, self-expression, and critical thinking skills through art-making and art observation. Students gain foundational knowledge of art mediums, as well as the elements and principles of art and design. This course will include 2D and 3D mediums, and art history.

#### **2-Dimensional Art Exploration**

##### *7th & 8th Grades (fall semester)*

2-Dimensional Art Exploration is for students who wish to expand their skills in 2D art mediums. This course focuses on drawing, painting, collaging, and printmaking techniques. Students gain the vocabulary and skills to discuss and critique art. They are introduced to a diverse range of Contemporary 2D artists, and learn to answer questions about the artwork's meaning, style, and technique.

#### **3-Dimensional Art Exploration**

### *7th & 8th Grades (spring semester)*

3-Dimensional Art Exploration is for students who wish to expand their skills in 3D art mediums. This course focuses on air dry clay, plaster, paper mache, and wire sculpting techniques. Students gain the vocabulary and skills to discuss and critique art. They are introduced to a diverse range of 3D artists to inspire and guide their artistic process. Students craft responses to questions about artworks and share their perspectives on the art shown in class.

## **Music Foundations**

### *6th Grade Semester Course*

The class focuses on developing skills in creating, analyzing, and responding to music. Students gain foundational knowledge of musical concepts such as form, tempo, dynamics, and texture, as well as basic skills on a variety of instruments—including but not limited to keyboard, ukulele, guitar, string instruments, voice, and percussion.

## **Music Production**

### *7th & 8th Grades Semester Course*

Music Production is geared toward students who don't identify as performing musicians. In this course, we explore different digital musical platforms as we compose, produce, record, and edit music. We engage in significant music listening and analysis, following a loosely chronological history of popular music from the Blues to the present. Students in the Music Production class collaborate with each other or with students in other Music classes in preparation for Arts Night.

## **Music Performance**

### *7th & 8th Grades*

Music Performance is geared toward students who have a desire to deepen their expertise in instrumental and/or vocal performance. Through a variety of teacher-selected and student-selected repertoire, students work both independently and collaboratively to develop technical and expressive skills. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester, either as a soloist or as part of an ensemble. Students are able to choose whether they perform only for their classmates or for a wider audience at a Morning Meeting, Coffee House, Arts Night, or other performance opportunity.

## **HIGH SCHOOL**

High school students are able to select semester-long elective classes as a part of the High School Electives program. These courses allow students to explore a topic outside of their required courses and dig deeply into new content with multi-age peers. Classes meet 2x/week to allow students access to more different classes over the year. All high school students are required to take a minimum of one and a half semesters of elective classes per year (4 periods/week one semester and 2x/week the other). Students may take as many elective classes as their schedule allows. The listing below includes

past and current offerings. In addition to the Arts Department options, see the next section for past and current elective offerings taught by faculty from other departments.

### **Drawing and Painting: Fundamentals**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

This class is for beginner or intermediate high school students who would like to learn the basic techniques of drawing and painting. The course begins with drawing techniques through a range of mediums, including charcoal, graphite, colored pencils, and pastels. Students gain the skills to capture 3D objects on a 2D picture plane. Once the foundational drawing skills are mastered, they are also given the opportunity to explore the connections between drawing and painting, and hone color-mixing & realism skills on canvas.

### **Painting & Art-isms**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

In Painting & Art-isms, students develop a deeper understanding of painting techniques and build a portfolio in painting. Throughout the semester, they learn the techniques as well as the history behind them. Students explore painting using techniques and styles used by artists from different art movements from realism to impressionism and beyond. Along with each movement, students work in small groups to create presentations about an artist and the techniques used in their work.

### **Art in 3 Dimensions**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Art in 3 Dimensions explores multiple 3D art mediums, including, but not limited to: air dry clay, plaster, found materials, and paper mache. The goal of this course is to build on skills and understanding of 3D art mediums and develop language and self-confidence for critiques. The course culminates in a group project creating large 3D artworks to be displayed for formal critique among peers.

### **Art Vs. Craft**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

What is the difference between 'Art' and 'Craft'? Throughout this course, we discuss and debate the many answers to this question, while learning what are typically considered "crafting" skills. The course is divided into 3 parts: Paper Crafts (bookmaking, basket weaving, printmaking, etc), Fiber Crafts (knitting, crochet, sewing, natural dyes, embroidery, etc.), and Jewelry Making (metal, wire, beading, etc). Once students learn the basics and history behind each craft, they are given free reign to create whatever they choose in that medium. The course culminates in an opinion essay answering the question "What is the difference between Art and Craft?"

### **Ceramics: Hand-Building Functional Pottery**



*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Throughout this course, beginner-level students learn the foundations of functional ceramics including hand-building techniques of pinch, coil, and slab. If possible, 1-1 instruction in wheel-throwing may also be introduced. Through the progression of the semester, projects become more creative as students develop their skills beyond the basic techniques. After projects have been bisque-fired, underglazing and glazing techniques, including slip trailing, dipping, brushing, and sgraffito are used to adorn and provide food-safe coating. At the end of the semester, students take home handmade bowls, plates, cups, and more that will last a lifetime.

### **Printmaking Techniques**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

In this class, high school students have the opportunity to linger in the medium of printmaking; to learn about the history of printmaking, and to sample various techniques such as textile design, relief block-print carving, monotype/monoprints, collographs, eco printing, and screen printing.

### **Photography**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Photography is a semester-long class focused on learning the art of taking photographs. While most of our time is spent taking pictures, we also learn how to make those pictures as good as possible by examining the functions of a camera, the qualities of engaging photographs, editing techniques, and the works of famous photographers. This is a class designed for beginners, but students of any skill level can participate. Students with previous experience or training in photography can request to take the course for Contract Honors.

### **Advanced Portfolio**

*11th & 12th Grades, prerequisite: instructor permission*

Advanced Portfolio is for students who wish to develop a series of cohesive artworks, especially those who wish to learn how to use portfolios for college applications or to market themselves as artists. The beginning of the course focuses on developing visual language and expression within the visual art mediums of each student's choice. Students have deadlines throughout the semester based on their personal goals for their body of work. There is also particular attention to writing supporting Artist Statements to be displayed with artworks and gaining the vocabulary to talk and write about art. While there should be some exploration of new mediums and styles, the goal is to have a series of 3 or more works that are visually & thematically cohesive. After their work is completed and displayed at the Arts Night Event, the remainder of the course will focus on taking quality photographs of their work and building a website or social media site to promote and share their work at a professional level.

### **Oil Painting Intensive**

*Prerequisite: instructor permission*

This course is for students who have previous painting and drawing experience, and are ready to take on oils. To take this class, students must have prerequisite drawing and painting courses, or submit a portfolio for review by the instructor prior to registration. Students practice underpainting and brushwork, and are given the time & instruction necessary to grasp the fickle art of oil painting. Classes engage in formal critiques, and practice writing artist statements. Students are expected to spend a minimum of 10 hours of studio time per painting. Canvases will grow in size throughout the semester and culminate in a large-scale 20-hour painting.

### **Vocal Studio**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Vocal Studio is for students who want one-on-one instruction and coaching in vocal technique. Everyone physically *can* sing, but so many people are hesitant to sing with or in front of others. In this class, students learn how to use vocal technique to expand their range and expression and become more confident singers. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester. By the end of the semester, students will be able to sing with accurate, consistent intonation; develop coordinated breath support to increase vocal stamina and control; and establish beneficial practice habits to help maintain vocal development. Depending on course registration, Vocal Studio and Vocal Ensemble may be combined into one class.

### **Vocal Ensemble**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Vocal Ensemble is for students who want to sing with others! Sometimes the class functions like a typical chorus, with the teacher as director and sheet music in students' hands. Other times students take the lead on both song selection and rehearsal, with the teacher serving as coach, guide, and provider of resources. This class leans heavily on the use of practice recordings, which enables students to have significantly more autonomy and independence than in a traditional choral ensemble. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester. By the end of the semester, students will be able to sing with accurate, consistent intonation; develop coordinated breath support to increase vocal stamina and control; and establish beneficial practice habits to help maintain vocal development. Depending on course registration, Vocal Studio and Vocal Ensemble may be combined into one class.

### **Vocal Music**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Depending on scheduling and roster sizes in any given semester, there may be times when **Vocal Studio** and **Vocal Ensemble** combine into one course entitled **Vocal Music**. This course would be a combination of the two, with some students working on individual musicianship and others working on ensemble skills.

## **Instrumental Studio**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Instrumental Studio is for students who want one-on-one instruction and coaching in instrumental technique. In this class, students can continue to build skills on any instrument they already play, or they can opt to start fresh as a beginner on one of the following instruments: piano, ukulele, banjo, guitar, bass, drums. All students identify a primary instrument, and some may choose to work with secondary or tertiary instruments. Through a variety of teacher-selected and student-selected repertoire, students work both independently and collaboratively to develop technical and expressive skills. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester, either as a soloist or as part of an ensemble. Students are able to choose whether they perform only for their classmates or for a wider audience at a morning meeting, coffee house, Arts Night, or other performance opportunity.

## **Instrumental Ensemble**

*9th-12th Grades, prerequisite: at least one full year of instrumental study; exceptions require departmental approval*

Instrumental Ensemble is for students who want to play with other instrumentalists! Based on student interest and instrumentation, the ensemble may focus on a particular genre or style of music (e.g., jazz, classical, rock, pop) or split into two ensembles (e.g., a chamber ensemble and a jazz combo). Sometimes the class functions like a typical director-led ensemble, with the teacher as director. Other times students take the lead on both repertoire selection and rehearsal, with the teacher serving as coach, guide, and provider of resources. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester. By the end of the semester, students will be able to play with consistent melodic and rhythmic accuracy; follow a score, whether in standard or iconic notation; and improvise with confidence in at least one key. Depending on course registration, Instrumental Studio and Instrumental Ensemble may be combined into one class.

## **Instrumental Music**

*9th-12th Grades, prerequisite: at least one full year of instrumental study; exceptions require departmental approval*

Depending on scheduling and roster sizes in any given semester, there may be times when **Instrumental Studio** and **Instrumental Ensemble** combine into one course entitled **Instrumental Music**. This course would be a combination of the two, with some students working on individual musicianship and others working on ensemble skills.

## **Music Production**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Music Production is geared toward students who don't identify as performing musicians. In this course, we explore different digital musical platforms as we compose, produce, record, and edit music. We engage in significant music listening and analysis, following a loosely chronological history

of popular music from the Blues to the present. Students in the Music Production class will collaborate with each other or with students in other Music classes in preparation for Arts Night.

### **Music Theory**

*10th-12th Grades, prerequisite: 3 years of musical training; exceptions require departmental approval*

Music Theory is geared toward experienced musicians with a desire to delve deeply into the theoretical construction of music. Through solfège-based ear-training, composition exercises, and significant aural and visual analysis, students explore concepts of melody, counterpoint, and functional harmony. While music literacy is traditionally defined as the ability to read and write music in Western standard notation, this course expands that definition by incorporating rote-learning of non-notated music, jazz theory, and non-Western scales and micro-tunings (e.g., Arabic Hijaz, Javanese Gamelan, Hungarian minor, Ugandan equi-pentatonic, Turkish maqam). The semester culminates in an individual project involving research and composition.

### **Songwriting**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

This class is for musicians wanting to develop their songwriting skills, whether they choose to perform their own songs or write them for others to perform. Through guided songwriting exercises, exploration of songs by unfamiliar artists, and analysis of some of their favorite songwriters, students create and workshop songs collaboratively throughout the semester. No previous songwriting experience is necessary, though instrumental and/or vocal experience is helpful.

### **Musical Theater**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Musical Theater is a class for students who enjoy singing in a theatrical context. This course explores the history of American musical theater in an active context, leaning primarily on solo singing but also incorporating duets, trios, and full company numbers. Students also investigate the history of this art form through a critical lens, from its origins in Minstrelsy and Blackface to the modern-day Bechdel test. Throughout the semester, students will study the typical formula of a musical, from the opening number and the “I want” song to the 11 o’clock number and the finale. Previous vocal training is helpful but certainly not required for this class. The semester culminates in a performance, whether in a musical, cabaret showcase, morning meeting, or simply in class.

### **Acting: Foundations & Scene Study**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Acting: Foundations & Scene Study is for students wanting to explore theatrical performance through text analysis and acting technique. The first part of the semester is devoted to the Foundations portion of the course content, which includes exercises to engage physical awareness,

imagination, focus, and collaboration. With the help of monologues, scene work, and observational exercises, students develop a personalized creative process. Students then use their creative process to analyze a scene, create a character, engage with the scene's emotional content, and work to bring the script to life in performance. Experienced actors and beginners are equally welcome. Those with previous training will have the opportunity to serve as directors in addition to working on their acting craft. The semester culminates in a public performance.

## **ELECTIVES DEPARTMENT**

High school students are able to select semester-long elective classes. These courses allow students to explore a topic outside of the traditional disciplines, and dig deeply into new content with multi-age peers. Some courses meet two hours per week and others meet four hours per week. Below are past and current offerings.

### **Africa**

This elective course serves as an introduction to historical and contemporary Africa, from ancient civilizations such as Ethiopia and Great Zimbabwe to contemporary trends and figures in media, music, fashion, philosophy, literature, and art, such as post-colonial theory, La SAPE, Chinua Achebe, Kalamashaka, or El Anatsui. Carried out through readings, videos, meetings cross-town and cross-continent, we'll engage the historical record as well as the contemporary thinkers and doers who have cumulatively led to the recently coined term "Africa Rising."

### **Creative Writing**

Do you love stories? Poetry? Scripts? In this course we study, write, and share. We work on the craft of storytelling. You can write fiction, poetry, scripts, or nonfiction in this class. How do you create suspense? Mystery? humor? "The surest way to arouse and hold the reader's attention is by being specific, definite, and concrete." - *The Elements of Style* (Strunk and White). With readings, videos, and daily writing, we create dialogue, tension, and plots. Most writing will be done in class. All students will build a portfolio with revisions and meta analysis.

### **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.

### **Epidemiology**

In this course, we examine the past, present, and future impacts of human diseases. This class is strongly multidisciplinary, with an emphasis on the biological, historical, and analytical sciences necessary to understand these complex systems. We use Agent Based Modeling and System Dynamics to model diseases, so it is vital that students feel comfortable with applying basic algebra and graphing skills and are willing to explore multiple computer-based platforms/systems/languages.

### **Filmmaking**

In Filmmaking class you'll have a ton of fun while also learning crucial skills for this Digital Age. From conceiving great stories and writing engaging scripts, to all the technical tricks of the trade, you will learn to be a filmmaker. Working in crews, students will become proficient in camera operation, audio production, basic directing, lighting, and editing - producing several film projects throughout the semester.

### **Financial Literacy**

Credit, debit, student loans, investments, crypto, stocks & bonds, housing ratio. We hear so many words related to finance in the news and in our daily lives, but most of us have not sorted out how these impact our day to day life. This course is recommended for students in grades 10-12 who are wanting to start thinking about how to pay for college, set up good habits, learn about investment accounts and strategize their financial life.

### **Health**

All students must take this course in either 9th or 10th grade. The Health and Wellness program aims to educate students in three broad domains: physical, mental, and sexual. Physical health includes eating, sleep habits, exercise, tobacco, vaping, drugs, and alcohol. Mental health includes mindfulness, mental disorders, coping strategies, and social dynamics. Sexual health includes puberty and body development, gender, sexuality, healthy relationships, consent, and sexual activity. Where possible, the interrelatedness of these health topics is emphasized and explored.

### **Senior Internship**

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.

### **Socrates Café**

Come learn about how to set up a Socrates Café and have deep dialogues on participant-generated questions that are both timely and timeless. We'll assume that none of us is as smart as all of us, and

we will work to create meaning by employing active listening, critical thinking, and tolerance for different perspectives.

## **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. 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. Our methodology is comprehension-based instruction, also known as Comprehensible Input (CI). This means that we aim at making sure our students understand the language imparted in the class. Progressively, we increase the complexity of the input in the target language but always keep it comprehensible.

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 speakers.

Differentiated instruction is a cornerstone of our program. All World Languages classes contain students with a wide range of proficiency levels and previous experience. Therefore, we provide activities adjusted to the needs of each student in each classroom, ensuring all students progress.

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

We have historically offered courses in Chinese as well as Spanish. Due to a decrease in interest in learning the language, we are in the process of sunseting the Chinese program. Some students previously enrolled in Chinese classes continue study of the discipline. For the 2023-2024 school year, the department is reconfiguring its language offerings, including some virtual options.

### **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, and 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 are 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 consolidates the use of present, past and future tenses, expecting students at the end to navigate among all three seamlessly. There is a significant amount of vocabulary covering a broad set of topics such as hobbies and recreational activities, travelling, 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 adapted newspaper and magazine articles, as well as novels with a strong cultural component but still modified for students of Spanish. Students also embark on a research project about a cultural topic of their choosing.

## **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 the elements described in level IV as well as primary sources. Spanish V assumes competency in all tenses as well as a wide range of vocabulary. The class activities include daily class discussions about current events, listening to primary sources and reading longer and more complex novels. Speaking and writing entirely in Spanish is expected. In this class students participate in debates on a regular basis, journaling, conversing with native speakers and watching a series created for a native speaker audience. Students also embark on a research project about a cultural topic of their choosing.

## **ENCOUNTER WEEK PROGRAM**

The Encounter Week program provides some of the most innovative and memorable experiences for Vermont Commons School students. For a week each in September, 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 canoe camping 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 undertakes a week-long

bicycle tour together. 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 demonstration of communicating their needs, actively reflecting, responding to feedback, following-through, contributing to the group, showing accountability to the group, and being willing to grow and learn.

Some 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.

### **White Mountains Backpacking**

On this classic Encounter Week students spend the week backpacking, carrying all the gear on their backs from campsite to campsite in the White Mountains in New Hampshire and Maine. They expand their wilderness skills (navigation, stoves, cooking, tents, expedition behavior, and more) as they hike the biggest mountains in the Northeast. Depending on the make-up of the group, they explore either the Grafton Notch Loop or climb the peaks around the Pemigewasset Wilderness.

### **Winter Writing Retreat**

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

### **Big Trips**

Each year Vermont Commons School designs trips to far-off destinations that require additional fees. Students who receive financial aid from the school may have \$1,000 toward Big Trips during their time at the school. 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 a Chinese food, art and culture trip to NYC.

## **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.

## **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

### **HEALTH**

The overall goals of the Health and Wellness program are:

- 1.) To provide helpful information and resources to students.
- 2.) To provide a safe space for students 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.

The Health and Wellness program aims to educate students in three broad domains: physical, mental, and sexual. Physical health includes eating, sleep habits, exercise, tobacco, vaping, drugs, and alcohol. Mental health includes mindfulness, mental disorders, coping strategies, and social dynamics.

Sexual health includes puberty and body development, gender, sexuality, healthy relationships, consent, and sexual activity. Where possible, the interrelatedness of these health topics is emphasized and explored. Students are taught in groups based on age so that topics can be presented and discussed in age-appropriate ways.

### **Middle School**

Students receive at least ten hours of health instruction each year.

### **High School**

#### **9th-10th grades**

Students take a health class as one of their electives once during these two years.

#### **12th grade**

Students have a retreat during the spring of their senior year in which they discuss the transition to college. This includes discussing how each of the three broad domains can affect them in their years after high school.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

All middle school students take P.E. twice a week. 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 jogging at Shelburne Farms, Capture the Flag in the woods, strength training, yoga, neighborhood walking, pickup basketball and volleyball. 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 season, and/or an outside of school physical activity taking place at least two hours per week over four months. High school students must complete the above requirements three of their four years.

## **EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS**

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

## **FACULTY AND STAFF**

Katherine Bailey

Registrar, Theater Director, Appointed 2014

Bennington College, B.A.

Jonah Boucher

Math Instructor, Appointed 2023

Hamilton College, B.A., Harvard University, M.Ed.

Linda Bursell

Business Manager, Appointed 2010

Champlain College, A.S., University of Vermont, B.S.

Chance Cardamone-Knewstub

Spanish Instructor, Ultimate Frisbee Coach, Appointed 2003

SUNY Binghamton, B.A., Tulane University, M.A.

Mark Cline Lucey

Social Studies Instructor, Director of Senior Projects, Appointed 2004

Connecticut College, B.A., Brooklyn College, M.A.

Jennifer Cohen

English Instructor, Appointed 2004

University of Notre Dame, B.A., Harvard University, M.T.S., University of Washington, M.A.T.E.S.L.

Adriana Comtois

Chair, World Languages Department, Spanish Instructor, Appointed 2004

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

Jasmine Easter

Assistant Head of School, Appointed 2008

Ithaca College, B.A.

Peter Goff

Chair, Science Department, Volleyball Coach, Appointed 1997

Hobart College, B.S., University of Vermont, M.S.

Tim Harger

Dean of Students, Appointed 2019

Haverford College, B.A., Columbia University, M.A.

Ryan Houck

Chair, English Department, Appointed 2019

Cornell University, B.A., Bread Loaf School of English, M.A.

Mark Keegan

Science Instructor, Appointed 2013

Northeastern University, B.S., Cornell University, Ph.D.

Courtney Lamontagne

Learning Specialist, Appointed 2019

University of Vermont, B.A., University of Vermont M.Ed.

Dexter Mahaffey

Head of School, Appointed 2014

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

Kristin Marchilena

Music Instructor, Appointed 2022

New York University, B.A., Bank Street College of Education, M.A.

Kathryn McDermott

Chair, Social Studies Department, Cross Country Coach Appointed 2018

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

Kris Mohlman

Science Instructor, Mathematics Instructor, Basketball Coach, Appointed 2015

Bowdoin College, B.A.

Kat Nelson

Director of Admissions, Appointed 2022

Dickinson College, B.A., University of Vermont M. Ed.

Sharon Panitch

Development Director, Appointed 2022

Wesleyan University, B.A.

Eliot Sloan

Director of College Counseling, Appointed 2022

Vassar, B.A., University of Arizona, M.F.A., Bread Loaf School of English, M.A.

Mary Thompson

Art Instructor, Appointed 2022

Plymouth State University, B.S.

Tonya Waldron

Mathematics Instructor, Appointed 2018

University of New Hampshire, B.S., University of New Hampshire, M.Ed



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