



# 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 Spanish 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](#)

[Spanish 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 Spanish 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 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 complete at least six courses (two hours of class time per week) in the arts, including at least one in each of visual and performing arts, or twelve courses in either visual or performing arts. In addition, high school students participate in three Encounter Weeks each year, and complete a course 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 Curriculum 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 involves 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 Scoir, 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. Throughout the semester, we will collectively read and discuss texts, like *Look Both Ways*, by Jason Reynolds. 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 look at the strategies authors use to construct meaning. They notice these strategies in poetry, short stories, essays, and novels and practice them in their own writing. Students write creatively, analytically, and persuasively, and are expected to keep up with 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

read in this class 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, there are also 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*

In ninth grade English students focus on strengthening their critical thinking and writing skills. They read challenging texts, discuss the themes, and write in a variety of modes about the reading. These modes include description, poetry, narration, argument, and analysis. One of the overarching themes of this curriculum is the juxtaposition between the transformative effects of a single hero versus the power of community. We begin with a study of the hero's journey in *The Odyssey*, and then compare that classic journey to the very different journeys in *Women of the Silk* by Gail Tsukiyama, *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai, *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, and *The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak. Students continue to increase their understanding of literary elements, grammar, and vocabulary.

**In the 20-25 school year, students in grades 10-12 will have a choice among several semester-long English Elective courses each semester.**

**The following courses will be offered in the Fall Semester:**

#### **Rushdie & Murakami: Magical realism in India/Japan**

Who defines fantasy and realism? After reading short texts by Rushdie and Murakami, students choose an author and do a large independent research paper on a text as well as the Indian or Japanese culture of storytelling. This course focuses on formal writing and secondary sources. Students should expect to work independently and plan/execute large projects/presentations.

Texts: *Knife*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *Pinball*, and Murakami short stories/novels.

#### **Writing Creatively and Analytically about Visual Art**

In this class, students explore a wide array of famous works of art. They study the artists and the art forms, and write essays, poems, and short stories based on these explorations. Students expand their ability to write powerful and coherent analytical essays as well as dynamic creative pieces. They read, discuss, and write about texts including *The Matisse Stories* by A. S. Byatt, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier, and *Frida* by Barbara Mujica.

### **East Asian Literature**

This course focuses largely on Japanese, Chinese, and Korean contemporary literature, from the dazzling Sci-Fi of Cixin Liu and Djuna to the sublime prose and subtlety of Nobel Laureate Kawabata, to the melancholy of Dazai immortalized recently in Junji Ito's anime or Murikami's over-the-top wit and humor. There's a vast body of literature out there, well beyond the clichés of Shogun, Jet Li, and haiku.

### **The Spring Semester will include several of the following courses:**

#### **Frankenstein and BladeRunner**

The dense text *Frankenstein* will be the foundation for this study of creations attacking the creator/science leading to dystopia. Studying novels, essays, and films, students write many essays, work on presentation skills, and write a screenplay adaptation.

Texts: *Frankenstein*, *Cat's Cradle*, *Handmaid's Tale*, and others. Films: *Bladerunner*, *A Scanner Darkly*, *Metropolis*, *The Matrix*.

#### **Hemingway's Code: Existentialism and the Lost Generation**

Students study short stories and essays by Earnest Hemingway, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, and others. They write many formal essays, do Harkness discussions, practice vocabulary, and create their own short stories. The lost generation explored meaning in a meaningless world.

#### **Single Author Study**

The Single-Author Study is designed to teach students to write a college-level analytical paper about an author of their choice. During the course, students use their knowledge of literary theory to analyze three novels written by their chosen author. By the end of this course, students are familiar with the process of reading for analysis, conducting research, creating an annotated bibliography, composing a literary review, and building a strong argument for a thesis.

#### **Images of Home**

This class focuses on two main texts that center on themes of home: *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie and *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi. We study these texts carefully, writing analytically and creatively. This is a deep dive.

## **Journalism**

This is a skills-based immersion into journalism. Students learn the foundations of journalism and the craft's two main components—reporting and writing the news. We explore the implications of how news is delivered in this modern age. Students in this course produce a school newspaper.

## **African Literature I**

This course is a survey of several of the most important texts from 20th Century Post-Colonial Literature in Africa. Novels, short stories, plays, poetry, films, and music all help to build a picture of the continent as it gained its independence from the European nations that had colonized it. Some of the pieces are a response to colonialism itself, forging new African identities, but all of them confront the tension between traditional culture and the modern wave of the latter 20th Century.

## **Contemporary Literature of Southeast Asia**

Southeast Asian Literature is changing. Old stalwarts like Pramoedya and Jose have passed on. And the new generation has taken hold, from Sabda Armandio and his irreverent, dystopian re-visionings of Indonesia to Duanwad Pimwana and Prabda Yoon, who are putting Thai literature on the map as we speak. Southeast Asia has ten percent of the world's population and a disproportionately high number of emerging authors and creatives. This course jumps on board for this swift-moving, electrifying ride.

## **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.

### **6th grade Math: 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; 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 builds on foundational mathematics, along with algebra, geometry, and probability. The first semester begins with an exploration of ratios and proportional relationships highlighting their usefulness to solve problems involving scale modeling, unit conversions, and leading to real life applications of percents. The second semester focuses on students manipulating number operations with rational numbers to create and use expressions and equations to represent and solve problems algebraically. Geometry is interwoven in both semesters with the discovery of pi and relationships among circles leading to expanding their three-dimensional knowledge to cylinders. The year culminates with a mini-probability unit where students actively engage in, and analyze, a series of situations, including creating games to gather data and explore experimental and theoretical probability.

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

This course provides more foundational understanding for the branches of mathematics. Students begin the year with a study of geometric transformations, including dilations, to extend their understanding of similarity and congruence. This leads to a unit on linear relationships where students model data using the slope-intercept equation. Students then build on their algebra skills by exploring solutions to systems of equations through graphing, substitution, and elimination methods. Next, students explore basic functions leading to volume and discovering the relationships among cylinders, spheres, and cones. Students further their geometry knowledge by exploring relationships among triangles and deriving the Pythagorean Theorem. Students also explore advanced number operations, including exponents, scientific notation, radicals, and work with irrational numbers. The year concludes with a mini-unit on statistics where students learn to gather data and create a variety of representations to understand and further analyze the data through a final hands-on project.

### **Math 3: Algebraic and Geometric Systems**

This course starts with a comprehensive algebraic review involving factoring trinomials, solving equations, and writing and using 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, students identify a feasible region to make decisions in situations that involve constraints. Following this, they explore transformations and 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**

This course begins with a comprehensive study of functions, including understanding their transformations and how they affect both their graphs and their equations. Functions of interest include linear, reciprocal, absolute value, quadratic, cubic, cube root, square root, reciprocal of quadratic, exponential, and logarithmic. Students then dig deeper into the quadratic function leading to exploring what the different forms of the equations tell us about the graphs and using a variety of methods, including the quadratic formula, to solve them to find the roots—including imaginary ones. Next, students dive into exponential relationships starting off with recursive and explicit sequences and leading to real life applications, such as compound interest. Through exploring inverse functions, students uncover logarithmic relationships both graphically and algebraically as they use them to solve equations. The course ends with a mini-unit on 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*

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, students move away from the study of functions to explore Conic Sections, analyzing and comparing their graphs, and why they behave the way they do from an

algebraic perspective. They finish the year with a brief unit introducing the notion of limits to prepare them for the start of Calculus.

## **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. Field journals are the backbone of the course; every organism we encounter is recorded in this journal. Students are expected to recognize more than 100 local animals and plants from sight/sound. Classes are held in the field regularly, with the VCS Outdoor Education Center being our focus.

## **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.

## **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 and their roles in the origins of life on Earth. 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, coevolution, 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 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.

## **Environmental Science - Taught each year**

### *12th Grade Semester Course*

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: Forensics - to be taught, spring 2025**

### *12th Grade Semester Course*

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. A multiweek project requires that students work in groups to solve a constructed crime scene at VCS. Throughout the semester, students also examine/relitigate (through mock trials) famous cases from criminal history to understand forensic science's impacts on our lives.

## **Electives**

### *12th Grade*

In the senior year, students vote to select one of their science electives. Some prior offerings include:

### **Elective: Animal Behavior**

#### *Prerequisite: Biology II*

College-level readings and independent experimentation are large parts of this course. Students 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. Students 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 an 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: 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 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. The sequence of classes is designed to build a toolbox of Social Studies skills for life beyond VCS. We want our students to understand geography, economics, politics, history, and social science. Our course materials focus on primary sources that center a variety of perspectives and voices - rarely does a student crack a textbook. In the classroom, we utilize a wide range of ways for students to build, access, and demonstrate their knowledge. Day-to-day, students are working in small groups, taking notes, engaging in role-playing activities, watching films, debating, using structured discussion techniques, and honing writing skills. We also emphasize core skills of academic research, writing, and argumentation, as well as allowing students to take more creative routes to demonstrate their learning, from podcasts to movie-making to presentations.

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

#### *6th Grade*

6th Grade Social Studies is an introductory civics course at heart as students 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. Students 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 these 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 they 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. They 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 semester course*

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.

### **American Foundings: Building A National Identity**

*12th Grade semester course*

This course is designed as a capstone to the student experience of history and social studies at Vermont Commons. We investigate how the complex American identity was created through waves of colonization and immigration, with particular emphasis on the early founding years through the dawn of the 20th century. 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 and skills from earlier Social Studies classes, using primary sources, discussions, presentations, persuasive writing, and close reading to build a stronger understanding of the roots of political and social conditions in America today.

### **Electives**

*11th & 12th grades*

Students vote to choose a semester-long elective 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.

### **The Good Life**

Economics has been called “the dismal science.” We are going to flip that script. What if economics, along with political, social and technological developments could help us address the things in our world that are actually dismal: homelessness, climate change, hunger, sickness? Humans created most of these problems we face - what if we could use our ingenuity to solve them instead? What if we could redirect our collective effort to create a better life for humans? This is a college seminar style class - based on dialogue, debate, presentations and student facilitation. Students are expected to prepare thoroughly for classes, participate actively in discussions, and explore their own learning/perspectives via projects and written assignments. Bring on The Good Life!

### **#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. This course is based on the framing of the social contract - what is the agreement between a citizen and their government about rights and responsibilities of each? What happens when the citizen feels that the government isn't upholding their end of the deal? What is the "right way" to protest, resist, and push back against a government? We also consider the tactical side of resistance - what are the track records of various methods of resistance, from non-violent movements to extra-legal sabotage and direct action? We read philosophers and radicals, we engage with ideas that probably challenge our sense of what it means to be a good citizen, and we broadly work to understand how political resistance has and can work to create change in our world. The course is largely based in reading and discussion 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.

### ***Past Elective Offerings:***

#### **Elective: The Vote: 2022**

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 2022 Congressional 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 legislative 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: 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 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 a minimum, high school students must take at least six semester-long (2 hour/week) arts classes with at least one course in each of visual and performing arts. There is also an option to specialize by taking at least eight semester-long (2 hour/week) arts class in one discipline (visual or performing arts). As long as scheduling and class sizes permit, students may take as many arts classes as they wish.

## **MIDDLE SCHOOL**

### **Art Foundations I**

#### *6th Grade*

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.

### **Art Foundations II**

#### *7th Grade*

This course builds upon a student's art skills through the elements and principles of art. Students practice a range of different art mediums including paper, paint, fiber art, and clay. Art history concepts and a variety of relevant artists are introduced throughout the curriculum as well. The goal of the course is for students to understand how to draw, paint, sew, and sculpt as they practice creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

## **2-Dimensional Art Exploration**

*8th Grade 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**

*8th Grade semester*

3-Dimensional Art Exploration is for students who wish to expand their skills in 3D art mediums. This course focuses on stoneware 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.

## **Lessons in Drawing**

*7th & 8th Grades semester*

Lessons in Drawing is a choice-based class for 7th and 8th grade students. This class focuses on building foundational drawing skills from perspective to drawing people. Students in the class choose which skills they want to learn and what types of subjects they draw, and get one-on-one or small group instruction. Most work is sketchbook-based, with a focus on practicing the skills, rather than the final product. Students can expect to have foundational drawing skills, whether they want to be an artist or gain confidence in their drawing to use in other classes, like their science journals!

## **Music Foundations I**

*6th Grade*

This 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 Foundations II**



### *7th Grade semester*

This class builds upon the skills and concepts of Music Foundations I. Significant time is spent in active listening sessions, during which we analyze tempo/feel, instrumentation/texture, melody, harmony, lyrics/mood, form, and other musical elements that contribute to the overall experience of listening to a song. Songwriting and composition play a role in the expressive output, though the structure will vary based on individual student interest. Each student works with keyboards and digital tools to support their creative work. Some 7th grade students take only this class, while others also choose to enroll in Rock Band and/or Vocal Music.

## **Music Production**

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

The intention of the course is to provide both performing musicians and music consumers alike with the tools and skills to create music that sounds like what they love to listen to. This project-based class involves significant independent work, and requires time and technology management skills. Students are able to self-select their desired challenge level and the specific production skills in which they want to develop fluency over the course of the semester.

## **Music Studio – Vocal and Instrumental Options**

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

In music studio classes, the objectives are to create sustainable practice routines, encourage reflection within and after each practice session, and foster intrinsic motivation that will hopefully outlast the end of the current semester. We welcome students of all experience levels in both vocal and instrumental studio classes. We especially encourage beginners to focus on piano, guitar, ukulele, drums, bass, or voice. Students have access to practice materials digitally and on paper, both self-selected and teacher-recommended. Studio periods can also be a time for individual or small-group lessons, coaching sessions, and music theory discussions.

## **Rock Band**

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

Course objectives for Rock Band are to develop ensemble musicianship skills (collaboration, listening, playing or singing in time and in tune with one another, etc.) and to work collaboratively to rehearse and hone performance repertoire. All instruments are welcome, including those not typically considered rock instruments. Song repertoire spans a wide variety of genres under the “rock” umbrella, including but not limited to blues, soul, grunge, hard rock, folk, indie, funk, and alternative. By the end of the semester, students will play songs in multiple keys and styles; develop technical skills on their primary (and perhaps secondary) instruments; establish beneficial practice habits; gain experience with live and recorded audio production; and build both confidence and skill in improvisation.

## **Vocal Music**

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

This class is a combination of full-group and studio time. During full-group time, we explore vocal technique and breath support, play singing games, work on unison and multi-part singing, and generally prioritize building a joyful, supportive singing community. During studio time, students work in practice rooms alone (if they choose) or in small groups. Studio time is used to practice ensemble repertoire as well as student-selected solo pieces. Studio time can also be used for individual or small-group lessons or coaching sessions.

## **Songwriting**

### *8th Grade Semester Course*

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.

## **HIGH SCHOOL**

High school students are able to select semester-long classes as a part of the High School Electives program. These courses allow students to explore an arts topic and dig deeply into new content with multi-age peers. Classes meet 1-4x/week to allow students access to different depths of focus and more different classes over the year. The listing below includes past and current offerings.

## **Oil Painting**

### *10th-12th Grades, Prerequisite: at least one 2-D arts class in Highschool*

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 grow in size throughout the semester and culminate in a large-scale 20-hour painting. This is a combination of level I & II, so students can take the course twice; level II students will have different assignments and serve as mentors to level I students.

## **Intro to Sculpture: Clay to Cardboard**

### *9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

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

### **Art Studio**

*9th- 12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Art studio is for students hoping to develop their artistic skills with more independence than the typical visual art classes. Projects are completed at their own pace, with occasional deadlines to keep in check. Students are responsible for deciding the medium, subject, and meaning of each artwork, as well as keeping a sketchbook or digital documentation of their process and practicing their skills. Lastly, they show a collection of artworks made in the class at Arts Night OR create a website to house their portfolio of work from the course. This class is Pass/Fail.

### **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.

### **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 a waterproof, food-safe coating. At the end of the semester, students take home handmade bowls, plates, cups, and more that will last a lifetime.

### **Intro to 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 interesting 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. This course is Pass/Fail.

### **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.

### **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. Students work in small, self-selected groups as well as in an ensemble with the full class. By the end of the semester, students will sing with accurate, consistent intonation; develop coordinated breath support to increase vocal stamina and control; establish beneficial practice habits to help maintain vocal development; gain technical skills in working with microphones for live and recorded sound; and build confidence and skills in vocal improvisation. Performance at Arts Night is strongly encouraged but not required.

### **Rock Band**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

Rock Band is for students who want to play music in an instrumental ensemble. Song repertoire spans a wide variety of genres under the "rock" umbrella, including but not limited to blues, soul, grunge, hard rock, folk, indie, funk, and alternative. The semester begins with a review of theoretical concepts and technical skills, from reading a lead sheet to common chord progressions and pentatonic scales. Significant time is spent in active listening sessions, during which we analyze tempo/feel, instrumentation/texture, and other musical elements that will shape our ensemble work. By the end of the semester, students will play songs in multiple keys and styles; develop technical skills on their primary (and perhaps secondary) instruments; establish beneficial practice habits; gain experience with live and recorded audio production; and build both confidence and skill in improvisation. Performance at Arts Night is strongly encouraged but not required.

### **Advanced Music Theory & Performance**

*10th-12th Grades, prerequisite: at least two full years of instrumental study, as well as instructor permission*

This class is for students who want to understand and perform music at a more complex level than the standard Rock Band ensemble. Song repertoire spans a wide variety of genres under the “rock” umbrella, including but not limited to blues, soul, jazz pop, experimental rock, folk, indie, funk, and alternative. The semester begins with an immediate dive into song repertoire and improvisation techniques. Deep listening frames our understanding of song construction, with special attention paid to harmonic structure (chord progressions, functional harmony) and melodic concepts (scales, modes). By the end of the semester, students will play songs in multiple keys and styles; develop technical skills on several different instruments; strengthen their practice routines; solidify fluency with live and recorded audio production; and incorporate significant improvisation. Performance is required at Arts Night and other opportunities that may arise throughout the semester.

### **Music Studio**

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

Music Studio is for students who want one-on-one instruction and coaching in vocal and/or instrumental technique, and/or the opportunity to spend a period each week in a practice room working on their own music. 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, guitar, bass, voice, or 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. Performance is not a requirement in this class, though students are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to perform live or record in the studio. This class is Pass/Fail.

### **Strumming & Songwriting**

*9th-12th Grades, no prerequisites*

This class is for students looking to explore song construction. Previous musical or songwriting experience is not required. Students will work independently and collaboratively, though this will not be a full-class ensemble environment. Some students will choose to focus on lyrical content: analyzing lyrics of existing songs and/or writing original lyrics. Other students will work with melodic and harmonic content, either on a familiar instrument or as part of an exploration of a new instrument. This class will primarily make use of piano/keyboard and guitar as vehicles for creative output, though digital tools are also available for use. We incorporate guided songwriting exercises, exploration and analysis of a wide variety of songs, and workshop songs for each other throughout the semester. This class culminates in an optional coffee house-style performance.

### **COURSES OFFERED OTHER YEARS:**

## **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 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?”

## **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.

## **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**

Some semesters 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 some past offerings.

### **Robotics**

This one-semester class introduces students to the design, building, and testing of robotic systems. We use the VEX robotics platform to study elements of structural design as well as a variety of ways to control motion in a robotic system - both to move the robot itself and also to enable it to manipulate objects in its surroundings. We also explore the role of programming in robotics, as a way to allow the robot to operate with partial (or full!) autonomy in response to information it takes in from various sensors. All of this happens in the context of design challenges - we learn by doing hands-on work!

### **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.

## **Virgil Abloh, the Louis Vuitton Mens FW21 Show, and Transnationalism**

In this two-day-a-week elective, we'll examine the legacy of Virgil Abloh through the lens of the Louis Vuitton Men's Fall/Winter 2021 show and its theme of transnationalism and migration. Architect, entrepreneur, DJ, co-founder of Off-White, Creative Director at Louis Vuitton, and first-generation American child of Ghanaian parents, Abloh was considered one of the most important fashion designers and cultural critics of our time. In this course we'll take a deep dive into Abloh, in particular his influence on the fashion industry. Course participants will have the opportunity to design and/or produce their own Abloh-influenced garments. Additionally, as a group we'll learn how academic writing is researched and created, with the goal of co-authoring a paper suitable for presentation at the African Studies Association's annual conference this December.

## **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.

## **SPANISH 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 Spanish 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 to make 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.

Developing oral fluency is a hallmark of our program. Starting in 6th grade with basic questions and answers, it grows in complexity and evolves into daily organic conversations about topics from personal interest to whole class presentations to interactions with native-speakers from our sister school in Lima, Peru. Semester and final exams have a significant component involving speaking spontaneously about a given topic.

Differentiated instruction is a cornerstone of our program. All Spanish 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/or IV/V.

## **Spanish 6**

### *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 7**

### *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 8**

*8th grade*

In Spanish C, students have solid speaking skills and are able to describe images, carry on brief spontaneous conversations, and give presentations without writing aids. The study of irregular forms of the present tense is solidified, and high-frequency verbs are introduced in the past tense. Students are expected to write in long paragraphs and increase 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 write descriptive fictional pieces. Video projects are commonly used as assessments at the end of the semester. The 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 all the varieties of the past tense. There is a significant amount of vocabulary covering a broad set of topics such as hobbies and recreational activities, traveling, work, health, politics, and the arts. The storytelling recedes and gives space for more frequent class discussions and questions about students' experiences and nonfiction texts. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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, 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 tripping 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 designed to build camaraderie within the class and help all students find their place in the broader community. 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.

### **Rock Climbing**

Climb rocks with us! From scrambling up easy ledges to gripping thin edges, you will have the chance to play on rocks and dangle from ropes. No climbing experience necessary. We will spend the first two days climbing (easy cliffs) in Bolton and learning how to belay. Wednesday morning, we will head to the Adirondacks to grip granite, camp by a pond, and hike (if raining). Monday and Tuesday are day trips, and Wednesday through Friday we are camping. The campsite is two miles uphill from the parking, so you must use a large backpack to carry personal gear and group supplies. You must provide your own climbing shoes. We provide harnesses and helmets. This trip is M-F with two overnights (Wednesday night and Thursday night) and open to all grades.

### **Filmmaking**

Let's make movies! This Encounter Week will load up a bus full of filming gear and head off to a cabin for a week of epic cinematography. Student filmmaking crews will script, shoot and edit short films that tell wild and crazy stories. This is how every filmmaker from Quentin Tarantino to Ava DuVernay got their start! When not creating our masterpieces of film we'll be cooking sumptuous meals, sitting around a backyard campfire, playing games and enjoying the wilds of NH. No prior filmmaking experience required - we'll teach you everything you need to know. We'll be away from Monday to Thursday, and on Friday we'll finish editing our films at school. This trip is M-F with three overnights (Monday night, Tuesday night, and Wednesday night).

### **Quilting Encounter Week**

On this home-based Encounter Week, students will take a look at quilts and textiles from all over the world. We will visit Shelburne Museum's display of quilts and be instructed by folks from the Vermont Quilters Guild before we get to work on making quilts of our own. Students will each make their own section of a quilt that we will ultimately turn into one large group project. There might also be some time to explore other sewing projects, like making small items (like a pillow or wall-hanging) or mending clothing. This Encounter Week is open to all grades 7-12 and requires no prior skills or special equipment. Pick-ups and drop-offs will all be at VCS during regular school hours, and there will be no overnights. There will be several off-campus, indoor-based field trips. On Friday, we will prepare lunch together, but on other days, students will need to bring their lunches.

### **Adirondack Canoeing**

The Adirondack Canoeing Encounter Week is a classic week of paddling and camping along Long Lake, Raquette River, and Tupper Lake, all of which run next to 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, be comfortable swimming with a PFD on, and be up for the challenge of constant physical activity. Prior canoeing experience and canoeing equipment are not required at all! Basic outdoor supplies (backpack, sleeping bag, sleeping mat, flashlight/headlamp) are helpful, but don't rule out this trip if you don't have the right gear - we'll figure it out! All food is provided from Monday dinner through Friday lunch, and is prepared communally. This trip is open to all grades and involves 4 overnights (M-F, camping at backcountry sites) - we will depart from and return to the VCS campus, with drop-off on Monday and pick-up on Friday within (or close to) regular school hours.

### **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.

### **Creative Writing in Café Culture**

Many of the world's great works of creative writing have been penned in a café or a setting like it. Something about that deeply private and personal act of creating your own original work--from poetry to short stories to novels or plays--has for generations been helped along by being around other people, in pleasant surroundings, with a cup of something hot in arm's reach. We'll spend our time this Encounter Week creating, sharing, and revising original creative writing in cafes and other conducive locales in and around Burlington, including some of our own making on and off campus.

With a particular focus on the writing of poetry and short stories, we'll read some exemplars to see how the great writers do it, we'll generate our own work, we'll workshop those new pieces, and we'll learn and employ revision strategies, culminating in a coffee house reading of our best work of the week. This E-week takes place during the regular school day hours. Open to Grades 7-12.

### **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 recent years have included traveling to the USA-Mexico border in Arizona to study immigration, 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 trip to New York City to study the arts in all forms.

### **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.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

All middle school students take P.E. twice a week. P.E. offers an 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 Capture the Flag in the woods, strength training, yoga, neighborhood walking, pickup basketball and volleyball. Our extracurricular athletics also meet during PE time.

## **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 (girls, boys); and Ultimate Frisbee (co-ed).



## **FACULTY AND STAFF**

Katherine Bailey

Registrar, Auxiliary Programs Director, Appointed 2014

Bennington College, B.A.

Linda Bursell

Business Manager, Appointed 2010

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

Chance Cardamone-Knewstub

Facilities Director, Ultimate Frisbee Coach, Appointed 2003

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

Mark Cline Lucey

Social Studies Instructor, Appointed 2004

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

Jennifer Cohen

English Instructor, Director of Senior Projects, 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, Spanish Department, Appointed 2004

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

Char Danis

Administrative Assistant, Registrar, Appointed 2024

Lesley University, B.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.

Will Long

Math Instructor, Appointed 2025

Skidmore College, B.A.

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

Chairs, Arts Department, Music Instructor, Theatre Director, 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.

James Rider  
Spanish Instructor, Social Studies Instructor, Appointed 2025  
Skidmore College, B.A., Clark University, M.A.

Linda Segovia Wise  
Math Instructor, Appointed 2025  
Florida Atlantic University, B.A., University of Vermont, M.S.

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.

John Tilson  
Math Instructor, Appointed 2025  
University of Tennessee Knoxville, B.A., University of Tennessee Knoxville, M.S.

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