

LAW OFFICES
READNOUR ASSOCIATES, P.C.
26 West Street, Suite 3
Rutland, Vermont 05701
Telephone (802) 773-7108
Fax (802) 773-6424

March 17, 2016

Honorable Jeb Spaulding
Office of the Chancellor
Vermont State Colleges
P.O. Box 7
Montpelier, VT 05601

Re: Vermont State Colleges Will Discontinue Free Courses For Seniors

Dear Chancellor Spaulding:

I am a Vermont senior citizen and have lived and worked in the state for over 30 years. I am writing to express my concern regarding the recently announced plan by the Vermont State Colleges System ("VSC") to discontinue free courses for senior citizens over the age of 65. I have attached a news report found on the Vermont Public Radio news source purporting to describe these actions.

As suggested in the enclosed article, VSC is changing a policy that has for many years allowed Vermont senior citizens over 65 years of age to attend VSC classes with a full tuition waiver. The new policy increases the cost to these seniors from essentially free to one half of the standard tuition rate. According to the article there are about 78 seniors taking advantage of the policy. I am one of the 78 Vermont senior citizens that will be directly affected by this policy change. For the reasons stated below, I respectfully request on behalf of all affected seniors that VSC reverse this policy change.

The existing policy is a good for VSC, Vermont and the senior citizens who are taking advantage of the policy. The benefits of a free tuition policy for seniors is widely recognized throughout the country. Many states have a free tuition policy similar to that of the VSC. Encouraging Vermont senior citizens to participate in a college classroom environment is a good thing for them and the institution they attend. By and large, these seniors are not doing it to change careers or get first degrees. They are doing it for the joy of learning, association with traditional students and to support the institutions they attend. That is why I participate in the program. While I have degrees in aeronautical engineering and law, I am enjoying studies in an entirely new field. In my case it is geology. My professor and Castleton University have been excellent in all respects. My fellow

students are fully engaged, supportive of my participation and greatly contribute to my enjoyment of this academic challenge. I am sure that is a common experience with other participating seniors.

While the benefit is largely mine, I also believe that senior citizens significantly contribute to the classroom experience for the traditional college students involved as well. I have worked as an engineer and a practicing attorney for over 40 years at the intersection of law and science. I think it is fair to say that my life experience, like that of all senior citizens, contributes to a diversity of perspective that can make a valuable contribution to broaden the experience of the traditional college student. Some colleges highly value such experience and actually give academic credit for life experience. I understand some VSC colleges even give honorary degrees for citizens demonstrating major societal contribution. One of the most important aspects of the present policy is that the benefit provided by having senior citizens in the classroom comes at *absolutely no cost* to the Vermont State College System. Senior citizen students are not taking the seats of potentially paying students and they do not otherwise increase the cost of instruction for the university. The existing policy is constructed to eliminate both potential concerns.

I am very skeptical of the only rationale for the policy change stated in the attached news account. You are quoted in the article as saying the major reason for the policy change is that there are other Vermont seniors in the 60 to 65 range who are complaining that they want to seek a degree and are not happy having to pay full price when senior citizens 65 plus are getting a free ride. With all due respect, I find that complaint difficult to believe and it should not form the basis for the change in policy, in any event. In my 50 years of professional life I have *never* heard a Vermonter or anyone else complain about a senior citizen getting a discount for anything, let alone a college tuition. Benefits for senior citizens are everywhere provided by virtually all private and non-profit corporations and governmental entities and they are universally supported by the population at large. Vermonters correctly recognize that the beneficiaries of these senior discounts are predominantly retirees living on fixed incomes and further respect their life long contribution to society and economic life, including paying taxes to support VSC. In short, I just do not believe 60 to 65 year olds or any other Vermonters harbor any anger or resentment for VSC providing this existing benefit to older seniors. Regardless, I cannot see why the VSC Board of Trustees should give credence to such scrooges and soreheads even if they do exist.

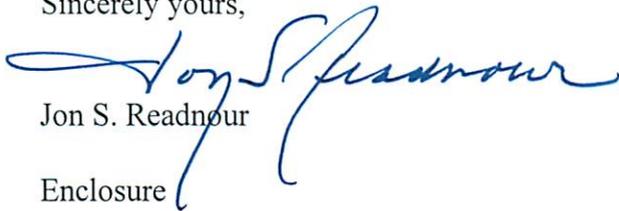
To be clear, I do not quarrel with encouraging nontraditional students like 60 to 65 year olds to attend the VSC system colleges by reducing their tuition. After all, as stated above, free and reduced tuition is a common state policy, nationwide. But the article suggests VSC is doing so because a vocal group of 60 to 65-year-olds want in on an increased benefit to “seek a degree”. Even if VSC wants to address this cohort, it can easily do so without affecting those student senior citizens over 65. Just reduce the reduce the tuition for 60 to 65 year olds. However, keep in mind that the new change in policy is not likely to significantly increase the number of 60 to 65 year olds attending school. The number is likely to be a miniscule. After all, the article says there are only 78 senior citizens over 65 statewide that are attending VSC now *when it is free*. How big could the number be when 60 to 65 year olds still have to pay one-half of the tuition? It will probably be very near “0”. From my own personal experience, most 60 to 65 year olds are still working to pay off their kid’s college tuition and weddings and otherwise trying to get financially ready for their retirement. It seems unlikely to me that many 60 to 65 year olds will be investing money for tuition to effect a career change in their dotage based on a half priced tuition offer. Of

greater concern to me and I hope to the VSC Board of Trustees is the likelihood that the number of senior citizens over 65 participating under the policy change will be a much smaller number than the 78 that presently exist. Most senior citizens are not going to be able to pay the additional money and therefore will not be able to participate.

Finally, I want to again acknowledge that it has been a great experience for me and, I am sure, for the other 77 senior citizens involved in the program. I have enjoyed my professor, the classes and all of the other students. The only other senior that I know that takes advantage of the policy would agree with that assessment. I have expanded that experience by taking advantage of other opportunities at Castleton University like going to a few college football and hockey games, use of other facilities, and Castleton's cultural offerings in Rutland. This direct hands-on experience and the enjoyment it has generated allows me to be a knowledgeable and outspoken cheerleader for Castleton University in particular and for the Vermont State College system in general. Those many benefits to Vermont, VSC and its senior citizens will be lost or seriously diminished by this policy change.

With the foregoing in mind, I respectfully request that the VSC Trustees reverse this policy change and maintain the present policy for the benefit of affected seniors, the VSC System and the State of Vermont.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon S. Readnour". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jon S. Readnour

Enclosure

cc: M. Jerome Diamond, Esq.
Governor Peter Shumlin
President David S. Wolk
AARP

Vermont State Colleges Will Discontinue Free Courses For Seniors

By Steve Zind • Mar 11, 2016

Vermont's state college system is changing a policy that allows senior citizens to attend classes free of charge.

Currently Vermonters over 65 can take as many as two classes per semester free, for no credit, at any of the state colleges.

Beginning in the fall the classes for seniors will be half price and for credit. The age limit will also be dropped to 60.

State Colleges Chancellor Jeb Spaulding told trustees during a conference call that most recent numbers show about 78 seniors were taking free courses.

“But there are others who say, ‘I want to seek a degree’, so they end up paying full price and they’re not too happy about it. This seems to be a good value for Vermonters that are age 60 and over,” Spaulding said.

The change could provide the financially-strapped college system with a little more revenue. Spaulding quoted figures that indicate the number of Vermonters over the age of 65 is going to increase dramatically in coming years.

Tuition for individual courses varies, but full tuition for a typical class at Community College of Vermont is roughly \$800.