



October 27, 2016

Hello Johnson and Lyndon campus communities,

You may remember that the VSC Board of Trustees is expecting a recommendation on a new name for a unified Johnson and Lyndon institution, scheduled to formally come into being on July 1, 2018, in time for consideration at its November 30th meeting. To inform that recommendation, President Collins, Interim President Atkins, and I have been doing a lot of listening, reading, and thinking about the possibilities. Last Friday, I had a very useful meeting with the [Unification Advisory Committee](#) on this topic. They suggested it would be helpful to update the campus communities on my current thinking and schedule more opportunities for interested people to discuss and weigh in on the options. To that end, I will be hosting two naming sessions, one on each campus, during the first half of November.

JSC: Friday, 11/4 at 9:30 am, Stearns Performance Space.

LSC: Monday, 11/14 at noon, Burke Mountain Room.

In order to stimulate discussion at these sessions on naming options, I would like to share a few thoughts in advance of them.

There is no way we will come up with a name that will make everyone happy. Some feel strongly the unified institution should be a college; others a university. Some think we should find a way to select a new name with the least amount of change possible; others think we should use unification as an opportunity to go big. Some people have asked whether we really need to come up with a new name for the unified institution at all, if there are going to be two distinct campuses.

It would be easiest to take the path of least resistance and choose a name that feels the most comfortable and least disruptive in the short term. However, it might be smart to use unification as a strategic opportunity to choose a new name that will provide the most benefit 3, 5, and 10 years into the future.

We really do need to choose a new name to comport with the standards of the News England Association of Schools and Colleges, our accrediting body. We also do not want to create confusion about what the new college or university really is.

The criteria for the new name have not changed:

- **A new name will include “Vermont” prominently.**
- **A new name will provide for inclusion of each campus. For example, Vermont State College-Lyndon and Vermont State College-Johnson or Northern Vermont State University-Johnson and Northern Vermont State University-Lyndon.**
- **A new name should not lead to confusion between the unified institution and the University of Vermont.**
- **A new name should be concise, be easy to remember, and lend itself to effective marketing.**

College or University?

A big question that will have a lot of influence on what the new name will ultimately be is whether the new institution will be a college or university. There are no specific or required criteria for an institution to be one or the other.

Some argue “college” most accurately reflects what each campus actually is, that unifying these two campuses into one accredited institution will not change the character of the campuses enough to warrant the “university” moniker, and that many of our students relish the small, personal, close-knit community feel that they believe is best reflected by being a college. Some feel “university” implies bigger, less personal, and potentially more expensive, and that this would turn off some current and prospective students.

Interestingly, I am told that the clear majority of students on both campuses would like their new institution to be a university. They believe that would add heft to their diplomas and be more attractive to prospective students.

Many colleges have switched to university status in recent years. Just a few New England examples include:

- Salve Regina of Rhode Island became a university in 1991. Enrollment 2,618
- Husson University of Maine was Husson College until 2008. Enrollment 2,800
- Bay Path University of MA was Bay Path College until 2014. Enrollment 2,370
- Castleton State College of Vermont became Castleton University in 2015. Enrollment 2,342

As a single institution, a unified Lyndon and Johnson would have an enrollment of 2,781.

The reasons many institutions transition to university status include: recognition of their graduate programs; clarification for international students that they are not secondary institutions (as the word “college” indicates high school in many countries); recognition that prospective distance

learning students appear to gravitate to universities; and prospective in- and out-of-state students value having the word “university” on their diplomas.

Research indicates that merely changing an institution’s name from college to university is not likely to be a panacea leading to increased enrollment and revenue. However, if we consider that as a unified institution Johnson and Lyndon confer a significant number of master’s degrees already; if we aspire to grow our enrollment in graduate, international, and distance learning programs; if we want to be as competitive as possible in a very challenging higher education environment; and if we take into account the desires of our students and campus communities as a whole, it would be smart to seriously consider university status.

Earlier this fall we conducted a non-scientific naming survey of our campuses. There were approximately 475 responses. Almost 57% favored university. 43% favored college.

Regional Emphasis

The survey also showed respondents’ strong pride of place and deep connection to their region of Vermont. A very significant number of respondents suggested names containing North, Kingdom, Northeast, etc. Regional descriptors are common with public institutions, as is the evolution of higher education institutions from college to university status. Some quick examples:

- Northern Arizona University was initially named the Northern Arizona Normal School in 1899. They had twenty-three students. The school changed its name to Arizona State College at Flagstaff in 1945. With further growth over the next two decades, the Arizona Board of Regents granted Arizona State College university status as Northern Arizona University in 1966.
- The University of Northern Colorado opened in 1890 as the Colorado State Normal School to train qualified teachers for the state's public schools, with a staff of four instructors and 96 students. In 1911 the school's name was changed to Colorado State Teachers College and two years later, in 1913, graduate courses were added to the school’s curriculum, leading to a name change in 1935, when the school became the Colorado State College of Education. The school continued to grow, and in 1957 the name was shortened to Colorado State College to reflect the wider range of programs and degrees. Finally, in 1970 the name was changed to the current University of Northern Colorado.

Identity as a State School

Another question to contemplate is the importance of having “State” in the name. As you can see from the two paragraphs above and from the Castleton example, it is very common for public institutions not to have “State” in their name. On the other hand, being clear that we are a public institution-would provide a measure of confidence to prospective students and parents in a time when other institutions are closing. Further, to develop a unique niche for our new institution in Vermont and within the Vermont State Colleges System, a name with State in it might be beneficial. The VSC System family could be:

- *Northern Vermont State University with campuses in Johnson and Lyndon
OR Vermont State College with campuses in Lyndon and Johnson.*
- *Castleton University*
- *Community College of Vermont*
- *Vermont Technical College*

I hope you find this communication helpful. Please feel welcome to attend one or both of the sessions mentioned above. Keep an eye out on campus or on the unification [website](#) for additional details.

If you can't make one of the naming discussion sessions, please feel free to email me directly with any input you may have. Depending on the volume of those emails, I may not be able to respond to each of them, but will guarantee you that I will read them all.

Thanks very much for your time and consideration.

Jeb