

# Grad Gift to the Vermont Class of 2020: **WHAT WE CAN LEARN**

THE J. WARREN  
& LOIS MCCLURE  
FOUNDATION



While new student enrollment at colleges plummeted nationally, enrollment of new high school graduates **doubled** at the **Community College of Vermont.**

The McClure Foundation's graduation gift to the Vermont high school class of 2020 helped make it happen. Here's what we can learn from it:

## In June, the Foundation awarded a graduation gift to the entire Vermont high school class of 2020

...of one course of their choosing at CCV that fall. The gift covered tuition and all fees and was offered to every person who graduated from high school in Vermont in 2020.

## By September, 600 graduates of the class of 2020 enrolled in their free course.

- These students represent over 10% of the graduating class of 2020 and double the number of recent high school grads enrolled in CCV in a typical year.
- About half of students said they would be first-in-family with a college degree.
- Orleans County had the highest enrollment rate relative to its young adult population.

Nationally, new student enrollment in college was trending the opposite direction: 16% lower compared to 2019 and 22% lower at community colleges (National Student Clearinghouse).

*"The opportunity opened me up to a career that I am now invested in. Without the free course, I would have never thought of attending college due to cost. It really gave me that **one amazing step into my future.**"*

—Foundation Recipient

**NICK C.** says college was something he dreamed about but never thought he would be able to afford. He's taking two courses while he works full-time as a personal care attendant. His dream is to become a graphic designer.

**EMILY D.**'s mom says it was "the exact right opportunity for her at exactly the right time... [it] sparked her interest in pursuing a degree in veterinary technology, which is not something that she believed could be possible."

**JOSH B.** plans to complete basic training for the Vermont Air National Guard before starting at UVM in 2022. He says college is "really expensive" for middle-class families and this free course helped.

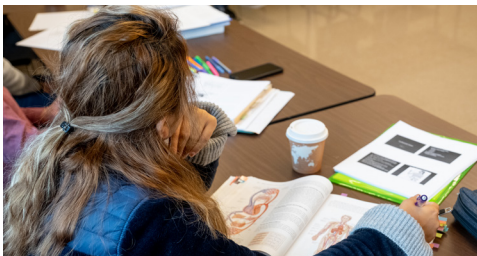
## Three **FACTORS** • Two **IMPLICATIONS**

The McClure Foundation points to **three factors** in the early success of the initiative:

**1. Core design values of hope and simplicity.** Every component of this initiative was designed to inspire hope and be easy to access: the scholarships were first-dollar-in; students could choose any course available at CCV; everyone who graduated from high school in Vermont in 2020 was eligible.

**2. An institutional partner that is responsive, creative, and ready to serve.** CCV is Vermont's access institution: it has locations within 25 miles of 95% of Vermonters and enrolls the greatest number of Vermonters of any college. Becoming a CCV student is simple and so is transferring CCV credits.

**3. Extra supports for CCV and students.** We directly supported marketing, administration, and evaluation of the initiative – and we worked with CCV and the Vermont Community Foundation to incent student engagement with academic and career advisors and peer groups.



Reflecting on the initiative, the Foundation sees **two implications for Vermont**:

**1. The public perception of college cost prohibits access.** With this gift, the McClure Foundation removed the perception of cost as a barrier to accessing college. When we consider what happened (the enrollment of recent grads at CCV doubled at a time in which new student enrollment at community colleges plummeted nationally), cost emerges as the primary factor in young people's decisions to pursue college and career training. **The enrollment demonstrates that when cost barriers are removed, students enroll.**

**2. Vermont needs far greater investment in higher education—and must be clear about the strategy behind that investment.** The State's annual investment of tens of millions of dollars in higher education must be rooted in a clear strategy. Choices abound: affordable pathways to high-pay, high-demand jobs; regional economic and cultural vitality driven by residential campuses; improved research and entrepreneurial capacity; incenting relocation to Vermont; etc. Each choice leads to a different policy and funding framework.

Our Foundation invests in college and career training systems because **1.** promising Vermont jobs are going unfilled at a time when Vermonters without the skills those jobs require are struggling to get by, and **2.** we believe public college and career training can be structured and funded in ways that improve economic equity and resilience. These reasons underpin every Foundation strategy and grant.

For more information on the McClure Foundation and its 2020 grad gift, visit [mclurevt.org](http://mclurevt.org) or contact Executive Director **Carolyn Weir** at [cweir@vermontcf.org](mailto:cweir@vermontcf.org) or **610-716-7218**.

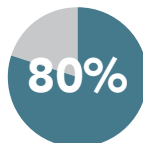
## February 2021 UPDATE

### New data on student successes and experience: **What Comes Next?**



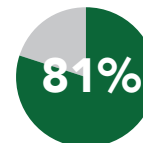
#### **COURSES COMPLETED**

Of the 1,213 CCV courses in which students enrolled, 90% were completed and 69% were completed successfully. 60% of enrolled students took more than one course at CCV.



#### **CONNECTED WITH ADVISORS**

80% of surveyed students interacted with their CCV advisor during the fall semester. In 73% of those cases, students discussed or developed plans for their education and career development.



#### **PLAN TO CONTINUE**

81% of surveyed students indicate they plan to continue their education in the near future. 61% plan to work while attending school.

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### What Students Had to Say:

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*"I am more involved with my future—and started to think about the careers I want to pursue. No one has ever pushed me or persuaded me to go to school. For the first time in a long time, I feel proud of the work that I am doing in my classes."*

*"I was not going to go to college this year, but because of the free course, I decided to try it."*

*"I wasn't originally going to do a college class because I don't want debt. This free class has helped me a lot."*

*"I've become sure (instead of just somewhat sure) of what I want to major in."*

*"This grad gift helped me out of a tough time in my life. Learning about this grad gift gave me confidence that I was making the best decision for my future."*

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The ongoing challenges and uncertainties connected to COVID-19 are likely dissuading recent high school grads from continuing onto college and career training without extra support. That's why we're thrilled the State of Vermont teamed up with the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation and the Vermont State Colleges to offer the Green Mountain Grad Gift: a tuition-free course for recent Vermont high school grads at any of the four Vermont State Colleges.

Reflecting on this initiative and the impacts of the follow-on investments it inspired, we're confident that a wide-scale change in the public's perception of the affordability and ease of access of college drives enrollment. Free courses are powerful enrollment incentives during a time of uncertainty; we applaud their expansion during the pandemic. That said: in a high-tuition state like Vermont, sustaining that public perception will require more than scholarships. It will require significant direct investments in the institutions where the students who are least likely to continue are most likely to go – investments that lower published tuition prices for everyone.

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