



In the spring of 2018, Vermont Commission on Women undertook a year-long qualitative data-gathering initiative, “the Listening Project”. The Project included various events during which VCW Commissioners and community members gathered to share and reflect on their experiences of living in Vermont, as well as a 16-question online survey. These efforts were designed to collect information and stories about challenges confronting Vermont women and their communities. With data from over 2,000 survey respondents and event participants, we are sharing the project’s results and stories to highlight the unique challenges and experiences Vermont women shared; these compelling anecdotes, combined with the recent data tell a powerful story. Here we highlight the stories respondents shared about their experiences related to higher education, employment and training in the state.

**The survey asked Vermonters to respond to: “What needs do you or women in your community have that aren’t being met? What do you think would help?”, here are some answers we received:**

“Free babysitting as an incentive for women to take classes at our community colleges would be helpful.”

*-Rutland county woman between 35 and 44*

“Programs to make college affordable that does not include additional loan programs. Students are buried in debt as it is. Higher ed needs to be more affordable.”

*-Franklin county woman between 45 and 54*

“As young women (and men) we enter the workforce after college/university with more debt than any previous generation. To live here and pay it off means putting off buying a house or new car and having a family.”

*-Rutland county woman between 25 and 34*

“More assistance from the state to colleges and universities in Vermont would certainly help more women attend college and get the necessary skills for better employment.”

*-Chittenden county woman between 35 and 44*

“Affordable access to professional development . Education and resources relating to women’s rights. Knowledge and skills for self-advocacy.”

*-Chittenden county woman between 45 and 54*

“I think that women are encouraged to go to college in very high numbers but are not supported once that is complete. We need career coaching and mentoring for women, for those who are very focused and know their path, and for those who do not. That time frame after college before a career has really formed is an important time to intervene and help women see their potential.”

*-Washington county woman between 35 and 44*

“College scholarships, student loan repayment and forgiveness programs. Free tuition. Paid internships and apprenticeships that included childcare.”

*-Lamoille county woman between 55 and 64*

### **What the data says about higher education, employment, and training opportunities in Vermont:**

- In the U.S., women carry almost two-thirds of the outstanding student loan debt. Nationally, black women carry the highest level of college debt - \$8,700 more than white women, on average.<sup>i</sup>
- A recent study found that women who have attended the University of Vermont make a median income of \$42,000 at age 34. This is over \$10,000 lower than the median income for male UVM graduates at 34.<sup>ii</sup>
  - The same study suggests that UVM ranks quite low amongst its peer “selective public colleges” in enrolling students from the bottom fifth of family income distribution; only 3.8% of its student come from families making less than \$20,000 a year, making it 345<sup>th</sup> of 377 selective public colleges.<sup>iii</sup>
- The wage gap in Vermont decreases significantly for women with higher education. However, women must earn at least some college credits to nearly match the income of men without a high school diploma.<sup>iv</sup>



**DATA**

<sup>i</sup> Change the Story, “2019 Status Report: Women, Work, and Wages in Vermont,” 2019, <https://changethestoryvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WomenWorkWages2019.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Gregor Aisch et al., “Economic Diversity and Student Outcomes at Vermont,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2017, sec. The Upshot, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/university-of-vermont>.

<sup>iii</sup> Aisch et al.

<sup>iv</sup> Change the Story, “Women, Work, and Wages.”