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## **New Report Looks At Trends in Vermont**

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A new comprehensive study on Vermont's most recent history will likely be an important tool in shaping future policy recommendations in the state legislature. In this report, the Council on the Future of Vermont (CFV) and St. Michael's College compare 160 trends during the last quarter century that make Vermont different than the rest of the country.

For the past two years, the CFV has been compiling data from counties throughout the state. This data was then translated into a research book entitled, "Vermont in Transition: Social, Economic, and Environmental Trends." The report, written by Dr. Vince Bolduc and Dr. Herb Kessel of St. Michael's College Center for Social Science and Research, is just a small piece of the much larger study being conducted by the CFV.

At a press conference at the college Tuesday, both authors spoke of how the report highlights the influence Vermont's homogeneity as a state plays in forming trends that can be mixed blessings.

For example, in 2006, only four percent of Vermont's population was non-white. Nationally, that percentage is 35. It's not just a racial difference - it's also the number of foreign born citizens, lack of Asians, and Hispanics. Hawaii is the only other state with a lower number of Spanish and Latin American born citizens.

Dr. Vince Bolduc sometimes refers to Vermont as the "Albino State." The fact it's so homogenous, almost makes it like a small city. He says, that can be worrisome in many ways.

"We're a very white state. And we are, depending on how you define us - we could be called the 'whitest state' or 'most homogeneous state' in the United States," Dr. Bolduc said. "But combine that with our small size, and it really makes a powerful difference."

Dr. Bolduc says homogeneity is something to appreciate, but also a way to identify where improvement can be made. One thing it lacks is diversity.

"It doesn't give us a lot of the robustness a lot of other states have. It gives us some quality of life things that are kind of a mixed blessing. It gives us rates of suicide that are slightly higher, which is a surprise. But it's true. It gives us lower mortality rates,

lower poverty rates, it makes us healthier," Dr. Bolduc explained.

However, economically, lack of diversity is harmful. Companies like IBM, state public and private universities, and Fletcher Allen Health Care, stick out as Vermont's largest employers. Dr. Bolduc points out, if one or more of those companies was to disappear the state's economy would take a disastrous blow.

"We really need more diversity in order to get that strength, that weaving together of things."

Similarly, Dr. Herb Kessel shows how lack of diversity affects the agricultural industry. Dairy, as a percentage of all agricultural sales in the state, makes up around 75%.

"There's no other state in the nation that relies so singularly on a single product," Dr. Kessel said. "Both has strengths, and as milk prices are declining recently, it presents some real challenges."

The report presented Tuesday was only a small piece of a larger project by the CFV. Data will be finished and presented to the Vermont Legislature in April. In May, it will be submitted statewide at the Summit on the Future of Vermont.

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