



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 19, 2016

Vermont College Recently Led by Socialist Sanders' Wife Closes in Financial Turmoil

The late Margaret Thatcher, former Conservative Party prime minister of Great Britain, once remarked that socialism works pretty well, until you run out of other people's money.

Burlington College in Vermont was not a socialist, or state-run institution, but it was led until recently by Dr. Jane O'Meara Sanders (shown), the wife of avowed socialist Senator Bernie Sanders. It was announced this week that it will close its doors on May 27.



Burlington has apparently run out of other people's money.

The financial woes of the small, private college developed from the real estate deal that Dr. Sanders talked the board into making while serving as its president from 2004 to 2011. She persuaded the board to enter into \$10 million of debt in the form of bonds and loans to obtain what has been described as "expensive lakefront" property. The land and buildings were purchased from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington, in an apparent effort to attract more students to the campus, and more donors to its treasury. The school closes with less than 250 students.

From its inception, Burlington College was marketed as a "free spirit" institution, launched in the living room of its founder and first president, Dr. Stewart LaCasce. LaCasce was the commencement speaker on Sunday, but no mention was made of the school's demise during the ceremonies, which marked the school's 35th year of operation.

Much of the curriculum was tilted to the Left — not at all unusual in modern American colleges and universities. Its Media Studies program offered coursework in "media activism and social movements," for example. But what set Burlington apart from most other institutions dominated by a left-wing ideology was its Cuba Semester Abroad.

The program, created in 2007, sent dozens of students from the Vermont campus to study at the University of Havana in Communist Cuba. According to the Burlington College website,

Living and studying in Cuba will sharpen the abilities of students to think critically and to imagine creatively. Cuba is a society that has gone its own way against enormous odds and has developed a society unlike any other. For the United States student, the island offers the singular opportunity to question, debate and discuss, to get beneath the surface of the issues and to evaluate independently the art, culture, history and politics of this unknown but compelling world, 90 miles from our shores.

Unknown world? Actually, there is really nothing unknown about Cuba except just how many of its citizens were executed or imprisoned since the Communist brothers Fidel and Raul Castro seized power there in 1959, establishing a totalitarian Communist dictatorship on the ill-fated island. While the



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“United States student” may have an opportunity to “question, debate and discuss,” Cuban students had better not openly question the Castro brothers, or they could be added to the aforementioned totals.

“A fascinating destination in the Caribbean, Cuba has been isolated from its northern neighbors in the United States since 1959,” the website noted without explaining why, but lamented, “In turn, we have been isolated from the Cuban people.” So Burlington College developed its Cuba Semester Abroad program in an effort to overcome this isolation, hoping to “open up the lines of communication.”

Now, with the closing of the little college, it appears that the goal of keeping lines of communication open with Communist Cuba will have to be handled by President Obama, who recently restored diplomatic relations with the nation.

When it became apparent in 2012 that Burlington College was facing an impending financial implosion, Sanders resigned, taking a generous severance package of \$200,000. Coralee Holm, dean of operations at the college, recounted the efforts of the school to survive the crushing debt incurred during Sanders’ tenure:

We have explored multiple, multiple options — just about anything we could think of. This is a great loss to the higher ed community, so we did explore many other options. But in the final analysis, none of them came through.

For example, the college sold off much of the land it had only recently purchased, while holding onto the small six-acre plot with the central building. Despite lowering the debt to more manageable levels, the school was recently notified that its \$1 million credit line would not be renewed. At that point, the college board of trustees felt it was out of options, and voted to close the college.

Another hit taken by Burlington was when, after being placed on probation by a Vermont accreditation agency because of its shaky financial situation, school officials were informed that they would not be able to award academic credit after January 2016. Despite the overwhelming debt taken on at the urging of Jane Sanders, school officials did not blame her.

Interestingly, among the more popular of the campaign proposals of her husband, Senator Sanders, who is locked in a battle for the Democratic Party nomination with former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, was his call for “free tuition” for America’s college students. National student loan debt is now estimated at \$1.2 trillion nationally. Annual tuition (not counting fees, which many colleges use to hide the true cost of the college “education”) at Burlington was \$21,500, which means a student who completed a four-year degree program (with maybe a little “study” abroad in Cuba) would take on \$86,000 in debt, just for tuition — not counting room and board!

Sanders and his wife have claimed they care little about material things; however, they have a personal portfolio of more than a million dollars, mostly in stocks and property.

Mrs. Sanders told lenders at the time the loan was obtained that the college had received \$2 million in fundraising pledges — a stipulation in securing the loans; however, the amount raised was actually only about \$279,000.

In an interview with a volunteer in the Sanders for President campaign which appeared in the left-wing publication *The Nation*, Jane Sanders offered a prediction of her role in the White House in her field of higher education:

I see my overall role, if I had the honor, as listening to the voices here in America that are not being heard and putting them out there for people to hear, but also researching and learning some of the



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best practices everywhere else and bringing them back here and letting them be heard as well.
Kind of a megaphone.

Hopefully, these so-called best practices will not include the slip-shod way Sanders conducted the finances of Burlington College during her tenure. Brady Toensing, a partner in the law firm of diGenova and Toensing, has even filed a legal complaint against Sanders with federal authorities, charging her with federal bank fraud.

It appears that Senator Sanders' wife may wind up "feeling the bern" in a different way from that felt by Bernie's idealistic supporters.

Photo of Jane O'Meara Sanders: AP Images



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