



Letter to Fellows

Technofeudalism

October 2025

Dear Rowland Fellows,

I hope to see you soon at the [All Fellows Retreat & Social](#) and the [14th Annual Rowland Conference](#)!

A recent [New Yorker cartoon](#) shows a normalish guy standing on the walk in front of his suburban-looking home with a vast, ominous data center looming just behind him on the other side of the street. Speaking into his phone, he asks, "Chat GPT, why is my electric bill so high?"

Funny but true, right? Even as we laugh at normal-suburban guy's cluelessness, we must also recognize that we are that guy. For example, instead of asking our government and Silicon Valley the tough questions, we teachers spent the last year learning how to weave AI into our lesson plans! It's not just the scary amounts of water and energy that AI data centers are soaking up. It's not just fear of the [Singularity](#), or a near future with drone warfare darkening our skies that feel ominous. It's also how Big Tech, AI, and politics are converging in truly terrifying ways.

Technofeudalism is the term that many economists and political theorists are using to describe the current moment. For example, there's the book [Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism](#) by Yanis Varoufakis, and [How Silicon Valley Unleashed Techno-feudalism](#), where

economist Cédric Durand describes a “new economic order, in which capital has abandoned production to focus on predation.” In [Capital’s Grave: Neofeudalism and the New Class Struggle](#), Jodi Dean writes that we are moving into a post-capitalist era, where “...many are bound to serve the few, coerced into a system of rents, destruction, and hoarding driven by privilege and dependence.”

If these books don’t scare you, there’s also Shoshana Zuboff’s [The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power](#), written before the pandemic, where she warns of the major threat to freedom and democracy posed by our current tech monopolies. Similarly, the writer [Asma Mhalla](#) has argued that the convergence of Big Tech and Big State constitute a “new architecture of power”, explaining that Trump’s domination of communication platforms to flood the public discourse with his interpretation of events is “not just a political crisis, but rather a crisis of the real.” This new totalitarian system, Mhalla argues, neutralizes the citizenry through “permanent cognitive saturation”, and also uses biometric technology and [big data](#) tools to effect “identity capture” as a means of coercion.

If any of this keeps you up at night too, I hope to see you at this year’s **Annual Rowland Conference** with **keynote speaker Baratunde Thurston**, whose podcast [Life with Machines](#) tackles many of these disturbing, emerging trends head-on, right now, before it’s too late. In the tradition of [Ruha Benjamin](#) and [Yoshua Bengio](#), Baratunde is working hard to seize this moment in order to imagine a radically different path than the one we’re on. The idea being that if humans can design our existing societal structures, then we can also imagine a way to deconstruct them in favor of democracy and human flourishing.

Look, to be clear, I don’t expect Baratunde to give us all the answers at our conference. I just think that this discussion of AI, democracy, and education is an important conversation to have, and I hope that you will be part of it. Just as important: all of our workshops are going to be offering ways to make our schools more democratic and humane. Just imagine. I hope to see you there!

Take care,

Mike

P.S. If you see “message clipped” at the bottom of this newsletter, please click through! Depending on how many photos we have, Gmail will sometimes truncate this newsletter.

P.P.S. Have you seen this amazing classroom [Imagination Playbook](#)? It was inspired by Ruha Benjamin's [Imagination: A Manifesto](#). Amazing.

Rowland Foundation Updates

The 14th Annual Rowland Conference

Registration Closing in Two Weeks!



It's going to be another great Rowland Conference this year. We have Emmy-nominated, writer & podcaster **Baratunde Thurston** doing a keynote and workshop on democracy & AI. We have 32 school teams already registered from around the state. We have amazing workshops led by DEW Scholars **Esther Charlestin & Infinite Culcleasure** and veteran Rowland Fellows **Jean Berthiaume (RF09)**, **Jess DeCarolis (RF09)**, **Mike McRaith (RF13)**, **Jeanie Phillips (RF14)**, **Erica Wallstrom (RF14)**, **Andrew Jones (RF15)**, **Emily Gilmore (RF17)** & **Carrie Gilman (RF23)**. See you there!

[Register your conference team here](#). Check out the [full conference program here](#).

Registration will close on **October 21st**, so be sure to register for the 14th Annual Rowland Conference on Thursday, October 30, 2025, if you haven't already!

All Fellows Retreat & Social

Stay Connected with the Network of Fellows



This year's [All Fellows Retreat](#) is on October 29th (1:00–4:00 pm) in the Kestrel space at 47 Maple St., Burlington. **Emily Gilmore (RF17)** & **Jeanie Phillips (RF14)** will lead a session on the [Integrated Curriculum for VT Educators \(ICVE\)](#), a unit design framework that incorporates elements of [UDL 3.0](#), the [IRIS Framework](#), [Proficiency-Based Learning](#), trauma informed & restorative practices, and social emotional learning. **Rowland DEW Scholar & VT State Board of Education Member Mohamed Diop** will provide some opening remarks about the importance of culturally responsive teaching, **Tara Cariano (RF18)** will lead a loving-kindness meditation, and **Erica Wallstrom (RF14)** will open our time together with a land acknowledgement. I am grateful for these important contributions from our colleagues and thrilled to share them with our brilliant network of educators..

The **All Fellows Social** (4:00–6:00pm) will take place in the same space immediately afterwards with complimentary beer, wine, seltzer & snacks for all in attendance. Plus live music and complimentary merch again this year!

If you can join us for one or both of these events, please take a moment to [RSVP here by Tuesday, October 13th](#) with your Rowland merch selections and the information we need to get everything ready for you.

Rowland Leadership & Encore Grants

If you are a veteran Rowland Fellow with a great idea, consider applying for a **Rowland Leadership Grant**. Applications accepted on a rolling basis for as long as funds remain. [More information & application form can be found here.](#)

If you are a veteran Rowland Fellow interested in teaming up with a few other Fellows to make something that will have a positive regional impact on Vermont education, consider applying for a **Rowland Encore Grant**. The 2026 application deadline is Dec. 31, 2025. [More information & application can be found here.](#)

2025 Rowland DEW Scholars

Diversifying the Educator Workforce



Many of our Rowland DEW Scholars are working in schools under a provisional license or as instructional assistants, even as they do graduate-level coursework and complete licensure requirements. They meet monthly with support from the Rowland Foundation and **Rowland DEW Mentor Bonnie Johnson-Aten** (*second from left above*). **Jenna Walker** (*above far left*) & **Rosa Atienza** (*above far right*) work in Burlington School District and **Tyler Boone** (*second from right above*) in Brattleboro. **Abel Alaniz** (on laptop) is teaching music at U-32 Middle & High School.

Collaborative Practices for Equity

Course Experience at Shelburne Farms



The 2025 Cohort of Rowland Fellows met at Shelburne Farms for the fourth day of *Collaborative Practices for Equity*, a course taught by **Senior Associate Jeanie Phillips & Aimee Arandia Østensen**. They are seen here with Principal Keith Lyman (*on far left*) and educator & poet **Rajnii Eddins** (*on far right*) who came to discuss the [VT IRIS Standards Framework](#) and related professional learning opportunities.

The Shared Leadership Retreat

Collaborative Work Groups from around Vermont



The **Shared Leadership Retreat** brought together 2025 Rowland Fellows, Principals & Collaborative Work Groups from around Vermont to develop a shared vision for the Fellowship work ahead. This year, Senator Peter Welch (*above right*) shared an acknowledgement and gratitude for Vermont's teachers. Special thanks to the day's facilitators: **Samantha Mundt (RF21)** (*above left*), **Sam Bromley (RF22)**, **Carrie Gilman**

(RF23), and Senior Associates Jean Berthiaume (RF09), Jeanie Phillips (RF14) & Lori Lisai (RF15) (*above center*); and Executive Assistant Abby Paige for the hard work, logistical acumen, and thoughtful hosting she provided to make the day successful. [You can see more photos from the day here.](#)

Celebrations



Congratulations to Emily Gilmore (RF17) who has a new job! This fall, she joined the Hunt Middle School staff as their Instructional Coach.

Congratulations to [DEW Scholar Jonas Kambire](#)! He has recently accepted a position working as a teaching assistant and paraeducator at Summit Street School in Essex Westford School District.



Congratulations to Anne Bergeron (RF11)! Anne is one of a team of four editors of and a contributor to [Dreams Before Extinction Anthology 2025](#). This new book is a powerful collection of writing and artwork by women who embody and share many ways to mend and celebrate our relationship with the earth. The anthology was launched at Librairie de Stiel in Montreal in April 2025.

Gratitude



2017 Rowland Fellows Gretchen Muller (RF17) & Emily Gilmore (RF17) are grateful to be hitting the links together again. They are seen here at their annual dress-up day at the Williston Golf Club's women's league.

Courtesy Posts



Vermont's updated Education Quality Standards require schools to ensure each student receives inclusive, culturally responsive educational opportunities. Join educators across Vermont to learn, plan, and implement the [new Education Quality Standards \(EQS\)](#) into your schoolwide systems and classroom practices. During four in-person sessions and four virtual sessions, collaborate within your school teams and with teams from across the state to deepen understanding of strategies from the [Integrated Curriculum for Vermont Educators \(ICVE\)](#). The workshop series is limited to 100 registrants, first come, first served.

The cost of this [workshop series](#) is \$100 for individuals and \$325 for a team of 4—and classroom teachers in their first four years of experience may attend for free! [REGISTER NOW!](#)



Anne Bergeron (RF11) will be offering an Embodiment in Writing workshop during a weeklong retreat for environmental writers in Montreal's magical Old Port in January. She'll also read from her work at Librairie Bertrand, as part of a benefit for The Raven Trust, an

organization that supports indigenous legal rights in Canada. Visit the [2026 Embodiment Montreal Retreat](#) for more information.
