

Galley

May 14, 1969

Perhaps yet another meeting to discuss the issues centering on the three course norm is in order (although I wonder how well attended the twenty-fourth meeting would be). To review briefly some of the arguments in favor of the three course norm, with reference to Judith Serin's galley:

- (1) "a three course curriculum is imposing a particular educational theory on everyone."

The student who chooses to enroll in any school is choosing to submit to the "imposition" of a particular educational theory. Insofar as Bennington's program is unusual, the student who enrolls at Bennington is submitting to the imposition of an especially particular educational theory. Still, this argument is neither pro nor con. The point is whether the particular theory is an educationally valuable one. If Judith is arguing against the imposition of theories in general, I am on her side: hopefully there is room for substantial change within the existing educational structure.

- (2) "We are supposed to make our own decisions about our education here..."

Twenty-three meetings (so far); EPC; and an ever-increasing number of committees. (Incidentally, is this to suggest that the faculty be denied a voice in educational policy?)

- (3) "The proposed change would make it impossible...for many of us who want a broad education and who wish to explore several fields..."

In the first place, I am sure I am not alone in thinking that there is infinite room (literally) for exploration within the structure of each course. Moreover, I have found that the more fully one area is explored, the more significant connections can be made with related topics in other disciplines. I think that one of the most valuable aspects of the three course norm is the opportunity it will provide to follow these connections through with greater commitment: to do more, for example, than merely to "dabble in the arts".

Secondly, I think the three course advocates are agreed that the institution of a three course norm would be accompanied by an increase in the number of one-semester courses offered, possibly providing students with greater opportunities for "breadth" than exist under the present system.

- (4) "The choice in courses at Bennington is too limited already."

The reasons for this have more to do with the size of the college and with its financial situation than with the number of courses a student is expected to take. The fact is, with the three course norm each teacher would be teaching three courses instead of two; hence a greater variety of courses would be offered. But in any case, it seems to me that Bennington would do well to concentrate

on what it does best, which is to provide opportunities for intensive work.

- (5) "We need our teachers' help and critical evaluation. That is what we are here for."

Several proposals have been made to the effect that a three course norm would bring with it an increased number of student-teacher conferences as a part of each course.

Overall, I don't see how the three course norm would "seriously limit the educational possibilities at Bennington". On the contrary, I think that with the institution of the three course norm the educational possibilities at Bennington would be significantly expanded.

I think it is unfortunate that the "cause" of retaining the four course norm has been identified with the "cause" of student "influence". It seems clear that both faculty and students are divided over the curricular issue; and to present the proposed changes -- even implicitly -- as a faculty attempt to override student opinion (especially when student opinion has not yet been polled) is simply a distortion.

Finally: I wonder how many of those who complained during last spring's men in rooms controversy that Bennington was no longer an experimental college, and presented themselves as staunch adherents to the principle of change, are as staunchly committed to that principle in matters of educational policy as they were over the issue of parietals?

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