

Mike Rock

10 December 1979

Joe Murphy

I read the draft written by Rash Welter and dated December 6th. I think it's got a very good idea which, if not especially original, at least exploits our strengths and minimizes our weaknesses. I think that fleshed out it is fundable and we ought to use it for both the Luce Professor application as well as for other possible interdisciplinary programs. One foundation that might have some interest which comes to mind is the Russell Sage Foundation. You might want to look into that yourself. If there's any way in which I can assist in promoting the proposal in question or some variation thereof please let me know.

Thanks.

JSM:cf

B. S. D R A F T

Bennington College proposes a new interdisciplinary program that will bring together in one major the study of European history, literature, and philosophy during the nineteenth century (ca. 1815--1914). Students who enroll in it will be asked to pursue course-work in each of these areas during their sophomore, junior, and senior years, and to participate in a senior interdisciplinary seminar that will be conducted by the Luce Professor for that year. (The Luce Professor will also be asked to give one course per term in one or more of these areas.) The effect will be to bring existing courses into a fruitful relationship with each other while leaving students who are interested in only one of the disciplines involved free to pursue that discipline for its own sake. At the same time, the program should also enrich the courses offered within given disciplines by mingling students whose interests are predominantly disciplinary with students whose interests embrace different disciplines rather than different topics or periods within a single discipline.

Such a program makes good sense at Bennington College, which has always encouraged interdisciplinary work, but which has not been able to afford the luxury of an interdisciplinary program. The institution now offers a variety of courses in nineteenth-century literature, including those of France, Germany, and Spain; it provides solid work in nineteenth-century history dealing with England, France, Germany, and the United States; and it offers courses in ~~modern~~ European philosophy from Kant and Hegel to the present. In addition its students generally welcome an opportunity to step across disciplinary boundaries, and they are accustomed to participating in discussion courses if not seminars.

hope

Joy
could we talk about
this? can we push it?
M. Rack

D R A F T

Hence the prospective senior seminar should work very well to consolidate their learning and integrate their interests, and it might also serve as a forum in which to discuss their several thesis topics.

The proposed program should also help to extend the range and significance of the college's instructional program by serving as a foil for work in areas outside the humanities. A number of faculty members in the social sciences (especially politics, economics, anthropology, and social psychology) are interested in exploring social structures and social change. The ~~existing~~ program would have the effect of drawing their students' attention to the existence of cultural phenomena they might otherwise ignore, while the unusually close contact among Bennington's students would also serve to remind those who are enrolled in the program of the existence of a non-European world that often provided the resources and the opportunities on which high European civilization built. Similarly, the present^{ce} of students in the arts (who are legion at Bennington) should help to broaden the operative definition of European culture while they themselves derived benefit from their close contact with students interested in European history, philosophy, and literature. In short, while maintaining its autonomy and serving a distinct body of students, the program we envisage can also be expected both to draw upon the resources of the college as a whole and diffuse its influence throughout the institution.

Rush Welter

6 December 1979