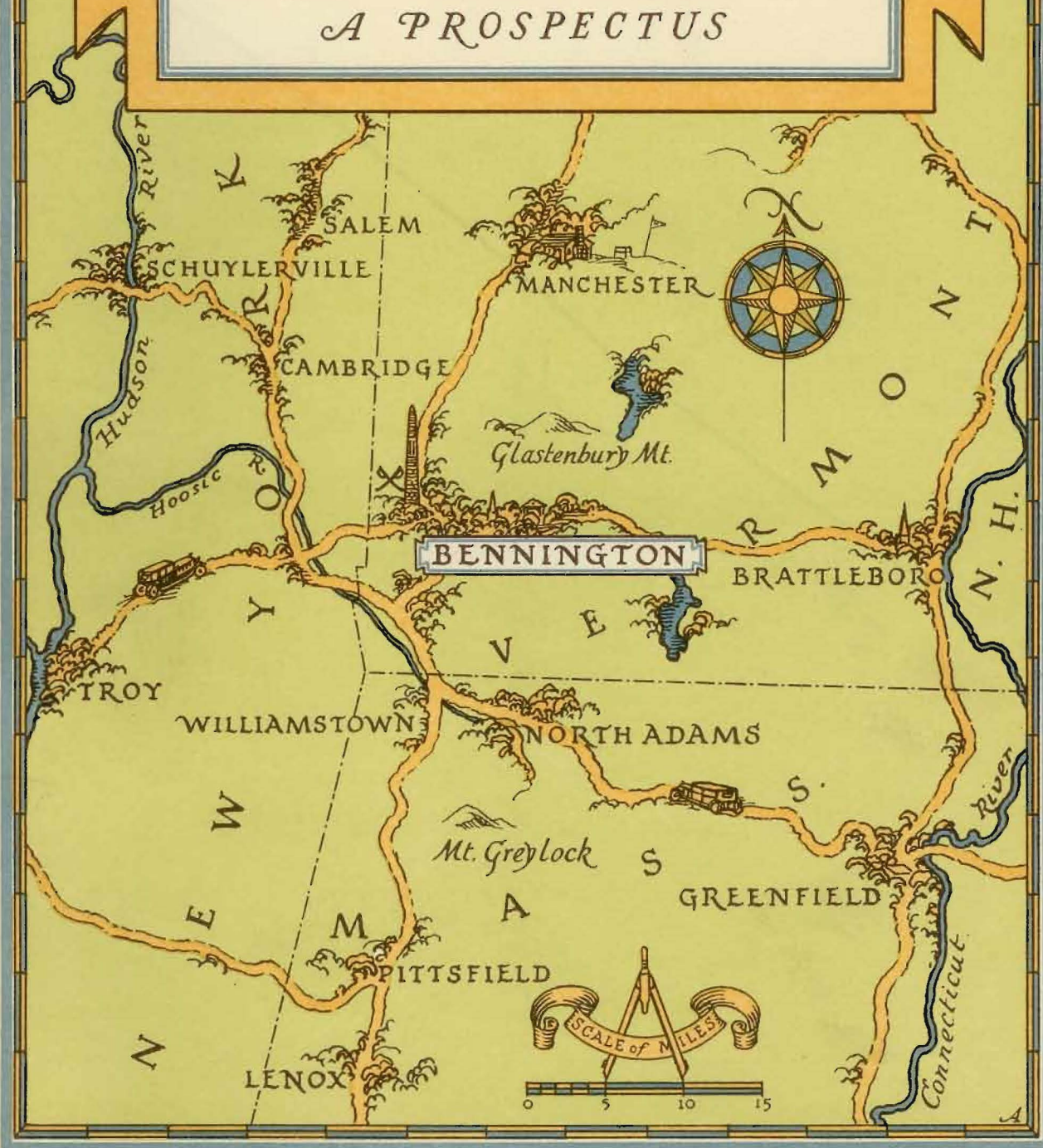


# BENNINGTON COLLEGE

*A PROSPECTUS*



"I admire the courage with which advocates of progressive schools and colleges are today attacking their formidable problems. I admire also their persistence and their inventiveness.

"I believe that these pioneers are acting on principles which alone can make education in the United States the firm support of political and industrial freedom, and the true safeguard of democracy."

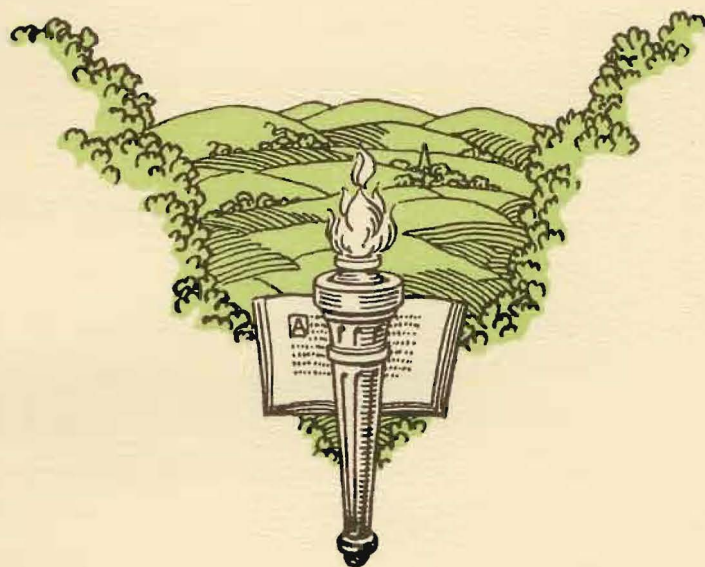
CHARLES W. ELIOT.



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# BENNINGTON COLLEGE

*A PROSPECTUS*



OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT

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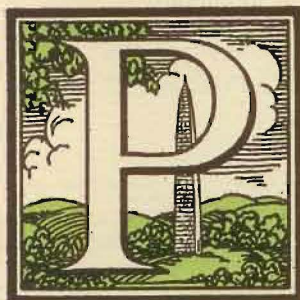
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## I. THE GOAL OF EDUCATION

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LATO felt that the aim of education was “to develop in the body and in the soul all the beauty and all the perfection of which they are capable.” John Stuart Mill included in his definition everything which “helps to shape the human being.” These two ideas, though centuries apart, are as modern as the radio. In their essence they represent the current viewpoint of modern sociology, modern psychology, and modern education. In their fundamental objective—to raise an individual human being to his highest possible effectiveness as a unit in society—they represent the aim of all great teachers: the Cro-Magnon mother who encouraged her child to become the first cave-artist, the Greek philosopher who taught his followers in the market place of Athens, and a Mark Hopkins facing his student from the opposite end of a log.

*“To raise an individual human being to his highest possible effectiveness as a unit in society.”*

Thus may be stated education’s general goal, from time immemorial. But the degree to which education has attained that goal may be judged by certain definite standards, worked out with painstaking care by modern educators during the past thirty years.

## The Ten Standards

All education, whether in home training, in nursery schools, in kindergartens, in elementary and secondary schools, in colleges, in universities, or in the continuing and life-long education of an adult, may be fairly evaluated by the answers to these ten questions:

1. *Is the emphasis focussed on the individual student rather than on the administrator, the teacher or the curriculum ?*

Copernicus revolutionized science by shifting the center of astronomy from the earth to the sun. The modern revolution in education has been brought about by shifting the center of educational thought from the system to the student.

2. *Is instruction based on the student's natural interests ?*

Modern educators find that every normal person has certain natural interests: communication, the desire to converse and to exchange ideas and information; curiosity, which leads a child to ask questions and a scientist to pursue research; construction, the desire to create or to build something which the eye may see, the hand may touch, or the ear may hear; and that finer expression which is the impulse toward the arts.

3. *Are the lessons learned by living, or by listening ?*

Permanent knowledge comes only through experience. Modern education is a part or aspect of life, not merely a preparation for it, the best preparation for the future being a mastery of the things of the present.

4. *Is the aim to develop independent reasoning, or to memorize the views and thoughts of other men ?*



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Plato defined a slave as one who by his actions expressed not his own ideas but those of another man. To treat the brain as a receptacle only is to foster an intellectual slavery.

5. *Is the system static or dynamic ?*

Modern education cannot live by tradition alone. Like modern business, it must constantly push forward the body of its knowledge, must adapt itself to a control of that knowledge and of the new conditions which result, and so lead the way to new advances in human thought and discovery.

6. *Is the training designed for the whole body, or merely for the brain alone ?*

It has long been demonstrated that thought is a product of the whole nervous system. It follows, therefore, that a sound body and emotional balance are conducive to sound thinking.

7. *Is provision made for the development of character ?*

Character, the very foundation of society, grows through experience rather than through mere precept. It is an essential function of education, therefore, to provide those experiences which will develop good faith, consideration for others, a sense of responsibility, and a feeling of obligation to play a useful part in the work of society.

8. *Is the student given a sound training in the skills, knowledge and abilities which are of lifelong value ?*

The "three R's," and their allied subjects, must always form an essential part of an effective system of education. The modern ideal is to emphasize the functional importance of such knowledge, and thus to make the student feel the need for it.



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That accomplished, these essential subjects, the tools of everyday life, may be taught more effectually, and learned more thoroughly.

9. *Is emphasis placed properly on the home and community?*

To train the individual for his selfish needs and interests only is not enough. Education should also provide a training in the part which the individual must play as a social unit in the home and in the community.

10. *And finally, is allowance made for the constructive and intelligent use of leisure time?*

Modern invention and modern management are constantly adding leisure time. Education must guard against wasteful and often harmful idleness by fitting the individual to employ his growing leisure in ways that will give satisfaction to himself, to his family, and to society.

These standards have already proved sound in elementary and secondary schools. Their thoroughgoing application to the field of college education is now demanded. Such an extension is needed not only because of the promise thus held out for an improved college system but also because the complete realization of these standards in the secondary school waits upon their proper application in the college field.

## II. HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

MORE than a hundred years have passed since Emma Willard started the first serious movement in this country toward higher education for women, by appealing to the New York Legislature for funds to establish a "female academy." What, in a few words, have been the developments since that day in 1819?

The fact is that Emma Willard and those who followed her have been doubly vindicated.

First, it has been shown — conclusively — that there is an insistent demand for the serious education of women. In 1890, approximately 31,000 women were enrolled in American colleges. By 1926 their number had increased to 289,861, with the New England colleges alone turning away fully 1,500 applicants for admission. During the last two decades it has been estimated that the number of girls demanding a college education has increased ten times as fast as the increase in population. "The situation," says Chancellor Capen of the University of Buffalo, "has almost the character of an emergency."

Second, it has been shown, as Emma Willard and other pioneers in the field confidently believed, that women are quite the intellectual equals of their brothers in the colleges for men. The women's colleges followed the curricula of the men's colleges from the first, and the records of their students have settled the question of women's intellectual capacity. This proposition needs no further proof.

But today the women's colleges of the liberal arts face certain definite and fundamental difficulties.



## Some Present-Day Symptoms

These difficulties are indicated by the following symptoms found in connection with the present system of higher education for women:

1. *A desire for an education designed for women, not primarily for men.*

Despite the increasing number of women who are entering vocations and professions in competition with men, it is recognized that there are many points of difference between the natural interests and needs of men and women.

2. *A belief that much college work has neither a vital appeal at the time, nor any true relation to living.*

It is a common complaint of college alumnae that the average curriculum overstresses the traditional and overlooks the experiences which should be provided in the light of a girl's normal pursuits.

3. *A tendency for capable girls to leave college voluntarily before the completion of the four-year course.*

This is a matter of common experience. Conditions in this respect vary considerably in the different colleges, but in one college, a study of a class of 254 girls showed that 46 per cent. withdrew prematurely, of whom only 16 per cent. were dropped on account of poor work. Of those who thus withdrew, 44 per cent. left college without offering any reason for so doing.

4. *A crisis in finance, now generally prevalent, and in certain instances acute; largely due to the disproportion between student fees and the cost of instruction.*



The serious financial needs of the women's colleges have entailed a sacrifice on the part of the teachers which is both unfair to the teachers and inimical to the preservation of high academic standards. Even more so than in the men's colleges, the faculties of the colleges for women are paying indirectly a large share of the cost of higher education.

### Some Efforts at a Remedy

The women's colleges of today are fully aware of these difficulties. Indeed, they have made a number of changes looking toward emphasis on the individual student and on independent thinking.

The changes in curriculum, however, with certain notable exceptions, have been chiefly a matter of addition, or of slight revision, rather than of reconstruction. Courses have been added principally to broaden the field of the institution or because of the increasing vocational trend. Some courses have been added as the result of noteworthy research by the faculty, others because a sum of money has been given to endow a certain study or a particular professor.

Actual changes in the curriculum have largely taken the form of reapportioning the number of hours allotted to the several subjects rather than of reconstructing the subject matter. Efforts in the latter direction, at the established colleges, have as a rule met too formidable a resistance in tradition and in the natural reluctance of teachers who feel an established interest in the content of the courses which they have trained themselves to offer.

Some of the actual innovations with which certain colleges have been experimenting are fairly well known; particularly the experiments with "honors" courses and tutorial systems. That these isolated efforts will in themselves lead the women's colleges out of their difficulties may, however, be doubted.



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## As Two Educators See the Situation

Out of an intimate knowledge of education both in this country and abroad, Dr. Agnes L. Rogers, of Bryn Mawr, in "A Study of the Causes of Elimination in a College of Liberal Arts for Women," has summed up the situation as follows:

"The chance of a fresh start is the greatest desideratum. One can with difficulty graft new curricula on old institutions. The purpose of education is conservation of the social inheritance, and it will always be hard for devotees, each in his own subject, to treat it as on a par with the rest, still less to see it losing ground. Changes we now try to introduce with great difficulty could be quickly accomplished by selecting a group of teachers whose convictions are in sympathy with such a theory of the higher education of women. A college faculty is an organic growth, and cannot be reconstructed over night. The traditions of all institutions are slowly modified, and change of regulations by vote frequently makes little real difference in student experience. A fresh start would cut this Gordian knot that 'slow tradition binding fast' has wrapped around the colleges of liberal arts for women."

Dr. William A. Neilson, President of Smith College, has said:

"It is clear that sooner or later, and the sooner the better, we must have more colleges. In saying this I by no means imply that we ought to go on duplicating our existing institutions, however defensible or even admirable some of them may be. \* \* \* As things stand today, it might seem wiser economy to leave the existing institutions to maintain their traditional type of liberal education \* \* \* and to try the bolder innovations \* \* \* in new institutions created for the purpose. Those who have had experience with the conservatism of college faculties will see other reasons for this policy."

## Summary

There is thus a distinct need for a new college of liberal arts for women. Not only is there need for further facilities for girls wishing to

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enter college, but the higher education of women has reached a stage where its adequate reconstruction demands a new institution with all the advantages of a fresh start. From this demand has come the plan to establish at Old Bennington, Vermont, an undergraduate college for women on a modern plan, and on a financial basis which should soon make it self-supporting.

There follows a brief outline of the Bennington idea.





### THE PRESIDENT

ROBERT DEVORE LEIGH, President-elect of Bennington College, is Hepburn Professor of Government at Williams. He is a graduate of Bowdoin and studied Education and Political Science at Columbia, where he took his degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

At Reed College, Portland, Oregon, he participated actively in that promising endeavor to unite educational theory with college practice, and later, as Lecturer on Government at Columbia and Barnard, he helped to organize the course on Contemporary Civilization, one of the first orientation courses in the country.

At Williams he has continued his work in the field of general introductory courses and has also helped to organize the honors work. He is a member of The Institute of Politics.

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### III. BENNINGTON COLLEGE

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THE plan for the establishment of Bennington College had its inception in the Summer of 1923, when a group interested in higher education for women held a conference at Old Bennington, Vermont, to consider both the shortage of facilities among the existing institutions and the need for a departure in women's education, in line with modern standards and insight.

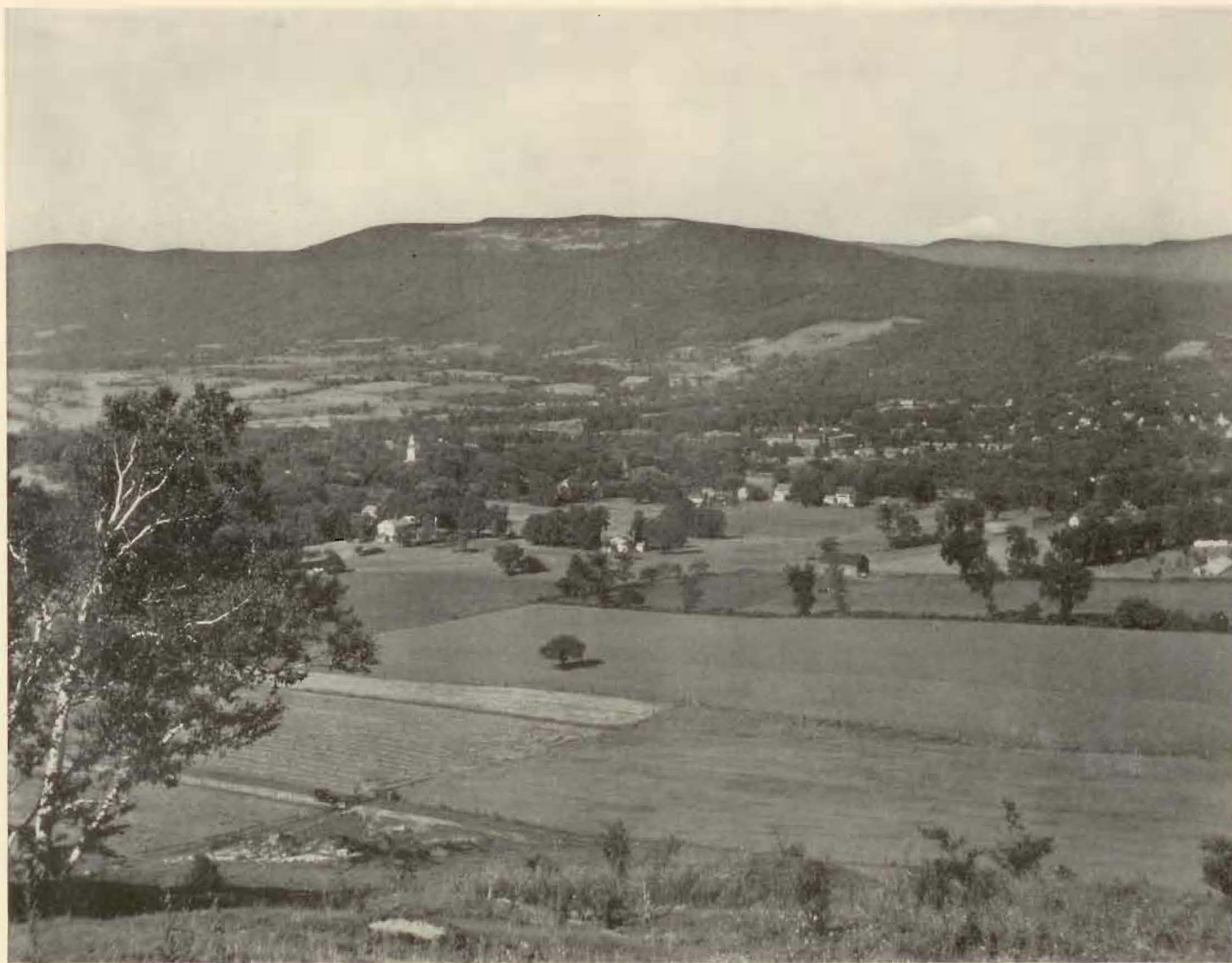
As a result of the discussions at that time, and of a later meeting of some 500 educators and representative men and women at New York City, in April, 1924, a charter was secured and a board of trustees formed for a liberal arts college for women at Old Bennington.

#### LOCATION

Old Bennington is felt to be an ideal spot for the college—ideal from the point of view of health, beauty and accessibility. An ample campus has been given for the erection of the college at the foot of Mt. Anthony, nearly 900 feet above sea level. This historic old village lies in the center of a beautiful valley, flanked by the Green Mountains and the Taconic range. It is within a mile of the business center of Bennington, a thriving New England town of ten thousand inhabitants.

Bennington is in the southwest corner of Vermont and is strategically located with respect to New England and New York, being approximately five hours by train from either New York City or Boston. One-half the urban population of the United States lives within four hundred miles of the college site.





View of the College site, from the slope of Mt. Anthony. Old Bennington and Bald Mountain in the background



## IDEALS

The aim held out for the new college is that of putting into practice the insights and standards of progressive education suggested above. These are, in brief, emphasis on the individual student and her developing interests; learning by activity and living; a curriculum planned for women in the modern world; an organization of college community life designed to break down artificial barriers between teacher and student and between curriculum and extra-curriculum to the end that attitudes, appreciations and emotions—character as well as the intellect—may develop along constructive lines; a conscious elasticity in educational plans, and a financial program which ultimately should make the college self-supporting.

## POLICY

A definite program to carry out these ideals will naturally be developed by President Leigh and the Faculty. Meanwhile, the Board of Trustees and the President have adopted provisionally, the following policies with regard to the selection and guidance of students, curriculum, faculty, trustees, plant, and finances.

### Selection and Guidance of Students

Both in the admission system and in the guidance of students after admission the object at Bennington will be "to spot and to develop excellence." Our colleges are already making progress in this regard, but much remains to be done. Some very able girls who could well profit by a college course are excluded. Many others are admitted who in fact do not profit, some because they cannot, others because they will not. Written examinations as hitherto conducted under existing requirements do not select candidates adequately and often put a hurtful strain upon growing girls in preparing for them. Certain required entrance subjects, such as Latin and parts of mathe-



matics, made necessary by a standardized Freshman curriculum are for most students no longer educationally defensible.

At Bennington there will be no set rule for all. The standards of admission will be high, but evidence of special aptitude, even though in a restricted field, will give a girl preference over another whose record is more uniform but also more mediocre. The accumulating experience of experts indicates that no one objective or impersonal factor can be used as the sole means of selecting the most promising candidates. A careful study of the applicant's present aptitudes and of her record in and out of the classroom will, therefore, be made.

This will be supplemented by conferences, held as far as possible in the city or town where the candidate lives, at which the Director of Admissions (a full-time expert in the field of personnel work) or other college officer may meet the applicant, her parents, and some of her teachers, may in this way obtain information as to the girl's potentialities and personality and may give to her and to her parents whatever information they may desire regarding the college. Advice and guidance will be offered to those who are rejected as well as to those who are accepted.

A primary aim will be that of seeking out the best prospective students rather than merely cutting off the least qualified at the bottom of the list of applications. The better students select their own colleges. On the basis of their school records any college would welcome them. Experience indicates that such students, often characterized by maturity, initiative, independence and stirring ambitions, are quite apt to be attracted to an institution with an educational program such as that of Bennington.

After admission a girl at Bennington will continue to receive consideration as an individual with her own personal tastes, interests, and capabilities. In addition to the adjustment of the curriculum so as to meet varying needs there will be an adequate staff of experts to give



individual training in health, and to offer guidance in the psychological mazes which girls so often meet as they pass to womanhood in the modern world. There will be encouragement in living a life of religion without compulsion. Unusual efforts will be made to coordinate the work of the entire staff in dealing expertly and wisely with the girls as individuals. To insure such individual care, it is intended to limit the enrollment at Bennington to 325 students. Although the primary purpose of Bennington will be to provide for the education of girls of the usual college age, the flexibility of the entrance standards, the recognition of individual differences in the program of study, and the system of financial self-support make possible some very interesting and significant ventures into the field of liberal education for adult women.

### Curriculum

The briefest general explanation of the curriculum and method to be pursued is that it will represent an effort to translate the spirit and method of the better experimental schools into the college field. A serious and extended study of the curriculum problem by competent experts has led to the adoption of the following tentative plan:

**Content.** The rather natural line of cleavage within the four year period of collegiate work, which provides that the first two years be spent in general study and the discovery of special interests and the last two years in concentration upon fields of special interests, was recognized before 1900 by the University of California and the University of Chicago and in recent years has been put into practice in varied and often incomplete or questionable forms by public and private institutions. At Bennington although the dual task of orientation and specialization is accepted as basic for the liberal arts college, provision will be made for recognition of individual differences in the progress from one type of work to the other.



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The organization will be based on the fundamental conception that the permanent and serious interests and ambitions of the student determine what she may most profitably study.

The Junior Division of the college will seek to effect orientation with life, largely through general courses which correspond to the stage of development and interest of the student at that time. In these and later years mathematics and modern language for instance, when used as tool or instrumental subjects, will be studied only by such students as see for them immediate use in the carrying of special work for which these tools are necessary.

Passage from the Junior to the Senior Division will not be secured formally or automatically by the bookkeeping devices of "units," "semester hours" and "credits," but rather by giving clear evidence of the development of a special interest or group of interests to be pursued in the last two years.

For many the special field thus entered may lead after graduation to professional study. For many others it will form the basis for an avocation. In any case, while the field of major work will be based upon individual tastes and aptitudes, it will provide the severe and effective discipline of self-direction with hard, continuous work. The test of actual competent performance will be set up and consistently maintained.

In the Senior Division the work for each student will assume the informal character of the honors courses now offered specially qualified students in several existing institutions of which Swarthmore is a notable example. This implies tutorial or small group instruction, guided and independent reading, individual and group library, laboratory, and field projects and activities. The formalities, artificial departmental groupings, and excessive division of the student's time will give way to purposeful and continuous activity under guidance. Advanced work in preparation for professional careers will go for-



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ward rapidly in such a congenial environment. Graduation from the College will be based upon evidence of actual competence in the field of special interest. Thus both the Junior and Senior Divisions will have a definite educational goal. Throughout, both will be consciously designed to meet the special interests and problems peculiar to women.

Much of the most valuable education at Bennington will come through organized community life rather than through formal classroom instruction. The wasteful conflict of purposes represented by classroom passivity in intellectual work, too narrowly conceived, and extra-curricular activity frittered away upon petty and unessential objects will be boldly attacked with the aim of obliterating the line between curriculum and extra-curriculum. In the informal life of the dwelling and dining halls there will be carried on under faculty guidance important discussions in hygiene, cooperation, toleration, religion, mental and social adjustments, living costs, and budgeting. So also tastes in art, music, the drama, and household decoration will be developed in their normal setting as elements of the undergraduate leisure activity as well as a part of formal instruction. In short the task at Bennington will be education in and through the conscious creation of a community rather than the mere organization of courses of instruction.

**Method.** From what has been said it follows that Bennington will provide more than anything else an opportunity for the whole-hearted application of methods and practices which have produced such remarkable results in experimental schools. These methods involve informal discussion, individual guidance, independent thinking, and purposeful student activity rather than formal lectures, mass instruction, and the mere accumulation of facts; they involve beginning with the present interests of students and providing the severe and lasting discipline of self-directed activity rather than emphasizing



ing traditional subjects which have been supposed to be of special value in "training the mind"; and they imply helping the students to live a life of rich and broadening experience rather than teaching lessons which have only an abstract and remote reference to a life beginning with graduation.

Such methods are now beginning to enter progressive colleges. But only by the untrammelled opportunity offered by a clean slate and fresh start can they be adequately weighed and demonstrated.

**Flexibility.** To maintain freedom from restrictive traditions, and to make certain that the college will keep up with advances in educational theory and practice, it is definitely planned to provide a fund the income from which will be used by the Trustees, President, and Faculty to carry on and to publish investigations in the field of higher education, particularly as related to the problems of Bennington College.

The college will resolutely face the task not only of inaugurating an intelligently progressive educational system but of devising means of remaining adaptable to changing needs and sensitive to the light of new truths.

## Faculty

It naturally follows that members of the Bennington faculty should have something more than scholarship, experience and professional standing. A determined effort will be made to obtain teachers with the personality to win the confidence of students in the peculiar personal relationships of the Bennington plan, and above all, with the progressive zeal of whole-hearted believers in the standards and methods of modern education.

In return, Bennington will offer to its faculty salaries commensurate with their ability—an initial maximum of \$7,000 a year has been established—and will make a stubborn effort to create and



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maintain living conditions and a social environment which will be congenial for the serious work which is the ambition of all real teachers.

### Trustees

In accordance with the tendency of the times in educational management and in business management as well, a policy of a revolving Board has been adopted. This will permit the constant introduction of new blood, new energy and new ideas.

The Board consists of fifteen members each elected for a period of seven years and so regulated that two members shall retire each year. While recognizing the manifest advantages in the way of sage counsel and wise guidance that results from life trusteeship, the Board feels that the present plan is preferable. There is a general understanding, therefore, that retiring members shall not usually be candidates for immediate re-election.

### Plant

It is the policy of the Trustees that Bennington shall erect no monumental buildings, but will adhere to a principle of alertness and readiness to meet changing conditions. Building requirements in modern education are subject to change and flexibility; therefore, utility rather than elaborateness, will be the basis of the architectural scheme. Full advantage, however, will be taken of the opportunity to plan an entire college plant which will be both useful and economical in arrangement and at the same time worthy of the surroundings of Old Bennington and the New England landscape.

### Finances

The Faculty will not be asked to help pay for the education of the students through accepting inadequate salaries. Neither do the



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Trustees expect to defray a large part of the cost of education at Bennington through the income from large endowments. Such funds are not available, nor are they contemplated. On the contrary, it is hoped that the annual expenses will be largely met by tuition fees. This will naturally involve higher tuition fees than those at other colleges, but the time seems to have arrived when colleges, beyond the initial investment, should be, approximately at least, self-supporting. A system of scholarship funds will be established, however, in order to prevent the restriction of students to one economic group.

These, then, are the tentative policies of Bennington College, to be reviewed, modified in detail, worked out to a complete program, and revised in the light of actual experience by President Leigh and the Faculty.

What may the college, with these policies, be expected to accomplish? What should be the results of the plan in operation for the individual student, for society, and for education?

### Expected Results

It is the hope of the Trustees that Bennington College may enable a large number of promising young women to receive a liberal arts education, and that its graduates may be equipped to play loyally and effectively a woman's part in the home, in the community, and in the general work of society.

It is hoped also that the thoroughgoing program made possible by the fresh start at Bennington will be of value to American colleges as a proving-ground for the underlying theories upon which it will organize its curriculum, method, faculty-student relations, and finance.

### The Need

The plan presented in the foregoing pages will be supplemented



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by a later publication giving in greater detail the organization and curriculum of the college and embodying the results of studies now being carried on.

A separate booklet will soon be issued stating definitely the sum which will be needed to establish the college at Bennington and to bring it to the point where it will be approximately self-supporting. Residents of Vermont have already pledged conditionally \$672,000; it is expected that approximately \$4,000,000 will be needed for the establishment of the college.

Gifts of time and endeavor as well as of money will be needed in order to complete the Bennington program. All those interested as parents, teachers, or students in progressive higher education and the problems of women in the modern world are earnestly invited to share in this educational adventure.

Detailed information concerning any of its features may be obtained from the President, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, or any of its members.

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MISS MARY E. WOOLLEY, *President*, Mount Holyoke College

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## THE NEED FOR ANOTHER COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

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The following executives of women's colleges and co-educational institutions have confirmed the need for another college of liberal arts of the first rank to be established at Bennington, Vermont.

FRANCES FENTON BERNARD, *Dean*, Smith College  
NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER, *President*, Columbia University  
SAMUEL P. CAPEN, *Chancellor*, University of Buffalo  
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