Bennington College, a liberal arts school founded in 1932, began as and remains an invitation to learn. Here, learning is a process of discovery, not “learning about.” The principle of learning by doing underlies every major feature of a Bennington education: the close working relationship between student and teacher; the insistence on self-determination, the commitment to collaborative learning, and the Field Work Term, which gives students work experience and connects them to the greater community.

At Bennington, students work closely with teachers who are themselves actively pursuing that which, in the words of one, keeps them awake at night. In consultation with faculty counselors, students design their own course of study specific to their interests, questions, goals, and needs.
Bennington is a school of approximately 500 students, who come from 43 states and 28 countries.

Clearly, a Bennington education demands of its students a commitment to self-governance and an understanding of the balance between freedom and responsibility. Bennington seeks resourceful, inventive students with a particular commitment to the challenges and joys of independent work, who will share their personal and academic strengths with this community.

The stories that follow are those of students who have learned to make the most of what Bennington offers. As you read their words, we invite you to consider if you might be one of them.

**Fun on the lawn:** The end of Common, moon lawn, where the view is amazing.

**Faculty Counselors:** Faculty members who meet regularly with students to discuss courses, the academic plan, work in progress, FWT, and other matters.

**Process Week (FWT):** Annual, two-month term when students work on or off campus at jobs and internships.

**The Bank:** Main administration building, once a barn.

**Early Childhood Centre:** A certified preschool and kindergarten located on the campus where students can observe and work directly with young children.

**House Chairs:** Elected student representatives who facilitate the process of self-government in each student residence.

**The Plank:** With the help of faculty counselors, students design their own academic programs. In their second year, they design a program of study for their final two years, called a "Tentative Plan." Students present a Confirmation of Plan and Statement of Purpose during their third year, finalizing requirements for graduation.

**Student Educational Policies Committee (SEPC):** Student committee that considers and communicates student recommendations about educational policy, FWT, and faculty reappointments.

**Student Endowment for the Arts:** Student organization endowed by Student Council that provides funds for independent student projects, including plays, concerts, guest artist appearances, lectures.

**The Symposium:** College-wide process undertaken in 1993-94 to reaffirm and reinvigorate the principles on which the College was founded.

**Tutoring:** Individual or group seminars proposed to instructors by third- and fourth-year students.

For detailed information about Bennington's academic structure and programs, please refer to the booklet "The Facts on Bennington." For information about the Symposium, please refer to the booklet "Panorama."
Bennington education values connections over differences. By refusing to insist on a boundary between science and art, for example, our students learn that the artistic experience need not be limited to the act of painting or sculpting; that science, like art, is more often a pursuit of the unknown than a recitation of the obvious.

Working with professionally active faculty members in small classes and tutorials, students forge connections between fields as seemingly disparate as music and architecture, ceramics and anthropology, physics and dance. This emphasis on interdisciplinary learning expands into the greater College community, as actors work with historians, biologists connect with poets, and dancers seek the collaborations of musicians, mathematicians, and sculptors.
"The big question I'm addressing is how modern technology affects our perception. I declared myself a Multimedia and Culture major in my tentative plan, but in my confirmation of plan I'll probably rename it Cognitive Science or Media Arts and Sciences. Because this is such a broad-based query, my plan allows me to take classes germane to it across six disciplines.

"My course work includes studies in electronic music, Japanese film, computer programming, cultural criticism, and philosophies of meaning. This term I designed a tutorial called Technology, Society, and Identity, in which I explored the title themes through critical readings, films, music, and theoretical applications of technologies such as virtual reality.

I have one friend who's building a virtual reality machine and another who's setting up a mock-up system. We're all going to be in an advanced programming class next term, where we'll start building robots that can implement the things we're creating.

"In the sense of being able to design my own program, I think I've learned far better at Bennington than I could have anywhere else."

"All my musical interests are extra-musical—I tend to involve myself in projects where I'm working with someone else, whether it's a dancer or another musician or a drama student. In that spirit, for the final project of my composition tutorial last term, I scored a children's book for clarinet, piano, cello, and three voices, and incorporated a dancer into it. [Music faculty member] Peter Golob conducted, and we invited the kids from the Early Childhood Center. It was wonderful.

"It's really both sides at Bennington. The composing of music is a solitary process for me. But then in the performance stage, I can work with dance and drama students. I love doing the music for the plays. It's not only that you write it and rehearse it and produce it; you get to see how that piece that you worked on from your viewpoint is really just one bit of what ends up on stage. I enjoy the collaborative process—getting input from all the different sources. That way it's something everybody experiences."

"Combining my theses in Spanish and drama is working out very well. I'm translating the Spanish play Fandito & Liz by Fernando Amado and writing an introduction for my literature thesis. After that I'll pick it apart, edit and adapt it, and put it together for my directing project. An another part of my final project, I'm in charge of lighting a Directing III production during spring term.

"The facilities for lighting are really good here. So is the access, and you really have the ability to design a lot. In two years I will have done lighting for five shows.

"I transferred to Bennington because I wanted a place where people had an enthusiasm or a passion for their work. It's been the right thing for me. There's a lot of artistic energy here. People are excited, they're ready to collaborate. That's what it's all about."

"Ezra Jack Keats, The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats, Morgan and The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats, Morgan, is a double major in lighting design with a secondary concentration in painting and Spanish. Morgan concentrated on lighting design for her FTHS, working at the Baltimore Theatre Project and the Theater for The New City in New York. She also served as house chair."

Adam Zelansky '93 of Arlington Heights, Illinois, has written original music for three plays at Bennington: Twenty Fifth Night, Avenues, Carried, and Muere, en el jardin santeria by Ian Powers '93. His band, The Broadmoore, played for last year's spring concert, a student-run AIDS benefit. For his adaptation of The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats, Adam set the narrative to music, cost the performance, created the scenery, and accompanied the singers on piano.
"I wanted to do a term working in sculpture and music together. The idea came from a project the term before, where the assignment in Sue Rees's sculpture class was to use a piece of plywood 4 x 8 x 1/2" thick, or to create something using the same dimensions. I wrote a piece of music using those numbers, performed in class as a sculpture.

"Working with Sue and Peter Golub [music], I designed a two-part project. The first piece involved a composition and a sculpture that had analogous parts. For the second piece, I chose to use something outside of music and sculpture—"Die Kirschens," a short story by Wolfgang Borchert, my favorite German author—to focus the work on. The second music piece, 'Elegy,' was performed by faculty members in the music division: Jacob Glick on viola, Gunnar Schenbeck on clarinet, and Peter Golub on piano.

"This kind of opportunity is part of why I wanted to study architecture here. Bennington's approach works with conceptualization, with form and material; it's all from the standpoint of being an artist as opposed to being a technician. The sculpture work that I do relates so closely to my architecture—I'm making objects, but they have to do with space, they have to do with ideas. I could just as easily have made a building about this short story as I did a piece of music and a piece of sculpture."

"I came here expecting to study either biology, English lit, or music. After I took a number of courses in science and literature, my faculty counselor suggested I also think about philosophy. Now I'm considered the first thematic science major, because I've taken a full biology degree and I'm doing both a senior biology project and a thesis on the history and philosophy of science during my final term.

"What's really exciting to me is my tutorial, Topics in the Philosophy of Biology, with two teachers who haven't worked together before: Ari Neuh (philosophy) and Michael Mushkind [biology], and maybe a few other science faculty members, depending on what we're talking about on a given day. We're looking at the development of some themes that arose in Darwin's work and how they've been transformed since that time. We're also studying science as a cultural phenomenon. Yesterday three teachers and I were in the classroom together. That was kind of fun—it was incredible, actually."

"I'd been at Bennington for two years, and I took a year off and went to Israel, where I did full-time volunteer work teaching Ethiopian immigrant children in an absorption center. It was a good thing for me—to be in a different context, to see the world from a different perspective—and my experiences there have become the basis of my senior thesis.

"My plan, Childhood and Society, incorporates childhood studies, anthropology, and photography. I expect to return to Israel for the first term of my senior year and use my FWT for independent research and photography work, then return to school to write my thesis. I see this project as an integration of disciplines and experiences: I'll be combining my personal experience and research with other data, with the photographic medium providing a visual expression."

"After I'd been at Bennington for two years, I took a year off and went to Israel, where I did full-time volunteer work teaching Ethiopian immigrant children in an absorption center. It was a good thing for me—to be in a different context, to see the world from a different perspective—and my experiences there have become the basis of my senior thesis.

"My plan, Childhood and Society, incorporates childhood studies, anthropology, and photography. I expect to return to Israel for the first term of my senior year and use my FWT for independent research and photography work, then return to school to write my thesis. I see this project as an integration of disciplines and experiences: I'll be combining my personal experience and research with other data, with the photographic medium providing a visual expression."
Direct participation in the planning of their education is an integral part of Bennington students' experience. During their first two years, students explore a range of disciplines within the liberal arts, after which they submit a plan of course work that will guide their final two years. In most areas of study, students complete a major independent project. Faculty counselors guide and advise students throughout.

To achieve their academic objectives, students engage all facets of a Bennington education: complementary course work, tutorials, and Field Work Term. Through this extraordinary process, students learn to develop the structures they need to shape their lives.
STATEMENT
OF PURPOSE

While I was studying photography, Neil Rappaport told me to find a Subject to photograph regularly, and to learn what the Subject had to teach me. I have since stopped studying photography, but it has occurred to me that I have

taken his advice: Israel and the Middle East have served as such a Subject, applied and studied within many different frameworks. The Subject provides a focus for my studies: my interest in comparative politics, international relations, and conflict studies alloriginate and converge here.

My courses have been chosen to relate to these themes. My plan includes many courses that relate directly to comparative and international studies: Introduction to International Relations (term 1), Human Rights (4), Comparative State Development (3), and State and Society in the Middle East (6) being the most obvious; Interest and Identity in a Global Economy (7), history courses on 17th to 19th

century Europe (1 & 4), Free Speech in America (3), and Pathologies of Power (8) are also highly relevant. Two more courses I was involved in warrant mention: International Political Economy and Interpretations of Culture (6). The use of the term 'conflict studies' finds its justification in courses such as A Social Psychology of Silence (5), Daily Life in Nazi Germany (7), and Human Rights (4), where I dedicated my personal research to the examination, on several different levels, of the ways in which people justify the infliction of damage and pain on an 'other'...Topics in Ethics (8) is intended to provide me with tools which may be useful for evaluating conflict situations.

...I therefore propose to write a thesis that uses the Subject of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to examine the field of conflict resolution. The challenge is to analyze efforts currently being made to resolve the conflict, in negotiations and applications. My thesis should include: (1) a critical analysis of relevant theories of conflict resolution; (2) an application of these theories to the historical context of the recent advances in Israeli-Palestinian relations, using the tools of conflict resolution to examine the developments that have compelled the Israelis and the PLO to reach their historic agreement; and (3) an exploration of the challenges still ahead.

"When I was 15, I made a video about environmental problems and realized that what I did could make a difference; I decided then that I really wanted to direct film.

"I chose Bennington, even though at the time the College didn't offer film," I felt I would learn more by not being around that environment since it's what I've been doing for a living since I was 17. As I got into my directing class with Gladden (Schock), though, I realized that film has its roots in theater and that I could apply what I was learning about directing on stage to directing on film—I just had to make the translation. Where photography applies is that it's really a way of seeing..."
“I chose Bennington because I wanted to explore the possibility of doing more than one thing. I came here thinking I was going to major in painting, but I was also interested in music, dance, drama, writing—all the arts, and how they work together. I’m writing an opera for my senior project—something that does exactly that—combines the disciplines: drama and literature and music, even dance and visual arts.

“When I came to Bennington I didn’t read music. Gunnar [Schonbeck] got me started with classical guitar, but it wasn’t formally offered here. During my first FWT, I found a teacher in New York City, and since then, to supplement my technical skills, I’ve played with students at other colleges and taken master classes in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. My approach has been the Bennington way of, if you want to do it, just do it.

“Bennington really deals with the whole person. If you’ve had a traditional education, you’ve gone through a system where everything is laid out for you. You get to Bennington and from the very beginning you have to make your own choices. Your counselor will help, but you have to decide where you’re going with your education. The people who do that, nothing can stop them.”

“My second-year FWT I got a job working for Reading Rainbow in New York. I’d always had an interest in various forms of mass media, and I absolutely loved it. So to pursue this outside of regular courses, I started focusing my FWTs on film and television. My next FWT I worked for an independent filmmaker who was making industrial films. I spent my summer studying film at NYU, and my final FWT I worked for the NBC news show AMW with Katie Couric and Tom Brokaw. It’s worked out very well.”
One clear advantage of a Bennington education is the direct and varied contact students enjoy with faculty members. Classes are small, intense, discussion-oriented. Written reports replace numerical grades, compelling teachers to consider each student's individual progress and students to develop goals rather than a GPA.

Actively engaged in their fields, faculty members frequently invite students to participate in research, projects, and performances. At Bennington, teachers begin as counselors and become, finally, colleagues.
"I transferred from another school because it was just too big and impersonal. I had two classes with more than a hundred students, and the four classes I ended up with were nothing like the ones I wanted. There were lots of teaching assistants there, but you couldn’t get hold of a professor.

"Bennington is much more manageable. Here, my largest class has 25 people. I meet with my professor all the time. It’s not always me seeking them out; sometimes they seek me out, which is definitely different. I feel much more a part of things. I don’t feel anonymous."

"Dance has always been the very much part of who I am and how I think. Because of a math class I took here, I started considering the connection between math and dance: Why is math so active, what is it that feels like the experience I have in dance? I did some reading and thinking about how math fits with the rest of the world. Western thinking, Asian thinking, human thinking. I got really excited about that. I realized that I needed to explore these areas to understand the questions I was asking, forget the answers. But how could I begin to bring these things together?"

"I went to see Susan Sperbati [dance], Aris Noah [philosophy], and Robert Puentesdaza [mathematics]. The reaction I got was I’ve been thinking about this, too—plan pages and pages of suggested reading. Susan was even working on a dance piece involving chaos. It became very alive and realistic all of a sudden, not just my idealization of what an education ought to be."

"We set up a Bill Moyers-style class and invited different people from the campus in to discuss these ideas. It was amazing."
A principle aim of a Bennington education is the integration of work and study; a goal furthered by the College's annual Field Work Term (FWT). During FWT—which are an integral part of the academic program and a requirement for graduation—students work at jobs and internships around the country and abroad. With the help of the FWT/Career Center, students compose résumés, write letters of inquiry, go on interviews, get jobs. They make transportation and living arrangements, handle finances, learn new skills. Following each FWT, students and their supervisors report on the experiences; these reports are part of the cumulative academic record of the student.

At the end of four years, students have acquired a body of work experience, a meaningful résumé and references, a network of contacts, and, most important, the confidence that they can make their way in the world.
"I had no previous history in the production side of theater when I came to Bennington—I'd always wanted to be an actor. But by my fourth term I was production stage manager for the main stage. Outside of course work, I took on other responsibilities—drama scheduler, office assistant, division production assistant, SEPC drama rep. My first two FWT jobs were theater related, too. Through all these different avenues I gathered enough tangible skills and background (they checked five of my references!) to get my third FWT job, at Theatre for a New Audience in New York.

"As assistant stage manager for Times Audiences, I helped with prop construction and acquisition, produced prop lists and scene breakdowns, notated blocking, monitored rehearsals—responsibilities only an Equity stage manager would normally have. I worked a 6-day week, 12 hours a day, sometimes more. I loved it; it was the most exhausting, educational experience I've ever had. I discovered how much I loved stage managing, that it's something my personality fits. And because of my background, I'll be able to advance to Equity pretty quickly. I am currently changing my major emphasis to production."

Drama major leaves
Oberlin '95 of Oconomowoc, Wis., has acted in four productions and stage managed a faculty production and an opera. For past FWTs he was a teaching assistant in his high school's drama department and a 4-0 assistant at Shirley Herz Associates in New York, a press agency for Broadway and off-Broadway shows, performances, and theater companies.

David Henderson '96, of Rochester, New York, pictured during his FWT at MIT, also worked at Saturday Night Live and VH-1.
A ny college can be overwhelming to first-year students. Because of its insistence on students finding their own way, Bennington may be more so than most. A special freshman program, in development for the fall of 1995, will help students navigate such experiences as setting up classes, participating in residential governance, and making FWIT arrangements. Negotiating such tasks is more than a matter of succeeding at Bennington. These skills will get students not only through college, but through life.
"I came to Bennington intending to select one or two things and really focus on them. I act, sing, write, am interested in politics, and have just become interested in visual arts since I've been here. I love being able to go into the sculpture studio in the middle of the night. Even as a first-year student, somebody already called me a VAPA rat. You can find me there any time of the night, working."

"I came here without any prior structured musical background. Most schools don't let you do that; they expect you to have had some kind of experience beforehand. When I came I didn't know how to read music and I hadn't had a voice lesson; I didn't play an instrument. I learned how to read and write music, took voice lessons, and started taking piano. And now I can do these things that seemed so remote before."

"Actually my first month was such a culture shock. Everything about the school was opposite to New York. I mean, there's air you can breathe here and green things growing. But then I relaxed. I breathed the air. I went for walks through the woods; it's a beautiful campus. I relaxed a little. I stayed."
Bennington’s physical structures reflect its ideals. There are no large dormitories, but small houses instead; there is only one large lecture hall, but dozens of seminar rooms; no amphitheaters with set proscenium stages and fixed seats, but flexible working spaces for dancing, acting, doing research, making art and music.

Students have remarkable access to facilities and equipment—from science labs to darkrooms to the observatory, from music studios and concert spaces to the 120,000-square-foot, infinitely adaptable Visual and Performing Arts Center (VAPA). The 550-acre campus not only provides space for learning, recreation, and contemplation, but also sometimes becomes a classroom itself.
“For last term’s ecology class we had to design our own project. Working with Bennington Greens [a student environmental group] on cutting a nature path through the woods, I discovered a beaver lodge and decided to work with that. I mapped out every tree the beavers had cut down, measured and charted each one, and looked for patterns. This term I’ve continued the project, introducing a ‘predator’ in one spot (a tape recording of a coyote and a facsimile coyote complete with dog’s hair and a wolf tail), and charting the beavers’ movements.

“I came to Bennington because I wanted to major in biology for pre-vet sequence and also to dance. If I went somewhere else I wouldn’t be able to do both.

“I’m a pure science major: I took five science courses my first year, seven my next. Plus I danced and took music courses and social science. The only term I didn’t dance, I took a piano course. And I got to use equipment like the NMR spectrometers my second year. There’s no way I would have been able to do all this anywhere else.”
“Dramatically, I’ve gotten to work in every space we have here, which has been incredible. The most thrilling was my one-man show, A Tale of Two Cities, which was the culmination of an acting tutorial. It was in Lester Martin Theater, a collaboration with other students in lighting, set design, costumes; together, we created theater. The other high point was AIDS Awake, a benefit event we did in Martha Hill Dance Workshop that brought together drama, dance, literature, visual arts, science—faculty and students from every discipline were represented. It was amazing to be in that wonderful dance space, doing something about AIDS. The whole campus turned out.

“That’s the thing about space at Bennington: its adaptability. You can create in house living room; one of the best dance concerts I ever saw was in Dickinson Science Building and I saw a great play at the End of the World. It’s so flexible.”

“This College tries to give you an education even a prince of the United Kingdom wouldn’t be able to get, in the sense of availability of all you need to learn. I discovered this at a concert in Greenwall. I always preferred rock and roll, but I knew there was something education ought to teach me—what people liked about classical music. It was crowded, and my seat turned out to be on a ledge right above the bass player. Because I was right there, about two meters above the players, I physically felt how complicated it is, an orchestra: that concentration, that group effort, that absolutely controlled creativity in action. When the conductor’s hand went down, I felt the bass; I felt how complicated it is. Instantly I realized why rock and roll is such a different and rather quick emotional release instead of something more complicated and creative.

“Weber’s Quiner’s adaptation of A Tale of Two Cities.

“From that moment, I realized what Bennington offers: the opportunity to put you in the environment without your being a professional of that subject. You don’t have to have practiced violin all your life to realize how wonderful, how interesting classical music is. Bennington figured out a way that you don’t even need to know what music is—you will understand what it is. A prince might not have the opportunity to sit with his foot about a meter away from the bass player. But a Bennington kid can, up in Greenwall.”

”

Above left: Greenwall Music Workshop, site of regular weekly concerts developed by faculty and students.
Community life—like so much else at Bennington—grows out of the academic and social interests of our students. Film series, plays, concerts, lectures, readings, live bands, pick-up basketball games—on any given day, the number of student-initiated events rivals those developed by faculty and staff.

The responsibility students accept in planning a curriculum applies to life outside the classroom as well. At Bennington, the capacity for self-governance is a prerequisite for success.
"When I took over the Women's Issues Study Group [WISG], I sent a survey to students asking what they were interested in. From there, we formed study groups and a health and direct action group for outreach to the community. Instead of bringing in a lot of lectures, we had a spring festival with musicians and poets and a student art show. This term we'll have a women's film festival, continue the study and support groups in the houses, and bring a lecture series back. Also, some women are putting together a zine of poetry. What makes WISG so great is that you can be non-political and be involved, but you can also be very political and be involved."

"During my FWT with an independent illustrator and comic artist in San Francisco, he told me comic-book artists all had little magazines in college. I was really inspired. I knew there were people on campus who did narrative cartoon work, and before I knew what I was doing, I started a magazine, Sirem. "The response has been great—about 25 artists represented altogether, and not all art majors. The second issue doubled in size from the first, and we got funding from the Student Endowment for the Arts and the Student Council. I sent copies of the last issue to all the big name comic artists around the country."

"Located in a twenty-story building adjacent to Commons lawn, the student-managed Cafe offers a range of social activities, seven nights a week. Downstairs is a small stage and sound equipment for bands. Friday and Saturday nights feature student musicians or outside bands. Upstairs is a late-night European-style cafe offering gourmet foods, coffees, and desserts. The upstairs has hosted the Bennington Fawon discussion series, Women's Issues Study Group lectures and films, receptions, movies, and student art exhibits. Above is manager Selma Rosay '96 of Kansas City, Missouri."

"Garth James '94 of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is a drawing/architecture major. To assure that Sirem continues after his graduation, Garth trained Hector Cousino '96 as the next editor."
"It started out as a small idea: to put together a transmitter that could broadcast within our house. After we built it, though, we decided a radio station should be campus-wide. We applied to Student Council for funds, and I met with just about every administrator in the Barn to get approval and a place to broadcast from. If I didn’t know the school before, I sure do now.

"It just took off. We raised money from several sources; about ten percent of the campus immediately signed up to produce shows; and the local radio station sent a dj out to talk with us about the business of running a station. All this in something under four weeks between concept and our first show."

"The third day I was in school I went to a SILO meeting and within a week I was part of the staff. It was really intimidating at first. At production time, I helped lay the issue out and went to the printer. That was my training. Now I’m already training someone else—I teach her how to be insinuate; I call and say, we have all this stuff to do before tomorrow."

"I’ve learned so much: how to not do everything by myself, how to be more assertive, what it takes to be representative, and how to do p.r. work. To fund the magazine, we have to apply every term for money from the Student Council, which houses vote on and distribute, which makes SILO a consumer oriented as any magazine: if the student body doesn’t like it, they’re not going to give you money."

"Working on SILO is as important as any of my classes—and it’s definitely resume material. I want to go into the publishing world, and as far as knowing what’s involved in it, I’ve gotten a real sense of that from SILO. I also have four issues of the journal as part of my portfolio."

Creative writing major Sarah Billings ’95 of Belfast, Maine, added SILO for two years, in addition to working as an editorial assistant in the Communications Office. During her tenure, SILO won first place for its category in the American Scholastic Press Association competition. Pictured: Sarah (far right) and the SILO staff at a meeting.

Picture: Chad Lawless ’94 of East Greenwich, Rhode Island (left), and fellow station executive Wendy Lawrence ’94 of East Hadley, Connecticut, and Rob Hekkerger ’94 of Nanticoke, Pennsylvania.