Calisher, others report on student literacy problem

Staff Report

Hortense Calisher, a visiting instructor at Bennington College, presented a report to the language and literature division meeting one month ago summarizing her disappointment with the inanity of some of her students’ inability to write. Calisher teaches a comparative literature course and a prose workshop.

Calisher explained her actions “At Bennington there is a great lack of motivation — a sort of laziness. Teachers must coax things out of their students. There is also a certain immaturity of attitude.”

Calisher said she had taught at City College where the students came from deprived backgrounds but were very devoted to learning. She stated, “At Bennington that attitude is sadly lacking in and out of the classroom.”

“Develotamental attitude is expected of the teachers by the students,” added Calisher, “in order to avoid a lack of discipline or dedication on the part of the students.”

Calisher also pointed to the fact that high school courses are not preparing students properly for college. In addition, she put some of the blame on the fact that this generation has been brought up entirely on television.

Calisher is not the only teacher at Bennington who has something to say about the literacy problem. Stephen Ferrullo, a history teacher in his second year at the college, offered a relatively similar view. “When I first came to the college offer a Composition I course.

He agreed with Calisher that the secondary schools are not doing their job but he also feels the literature division is not teaching students proper writing skills. Ferrullo also agrees with Calisher that students lack commitment and motivation but looks to the students to come from a frustration at the inability to perform properly.

Ferrullo commented on the prospect of teaching freshmen to write, “I don’t mind. It’s part of my job to teach people to write.” However, he believes that unless a basic writing course is instituted the problem will not go away.

Rush Welter, a history teacher who has taught at Bennington since the 1960s, described the upswing in student writing ability to write over the years. He said, “In the 1960’s when applications went up we had a different clientele than we do now. At that time students applied to Bennington and it was a first step. Nowadays, it is a safety school.

Welter compared the 1960s to the 1940s, saying that the change tells students “to compensate for a lack of discipline or to make the process more bureaucratic.”

Ken Renninger, an anthropology teacher who has taught at Bennington for seven years, agreed with Welter on students’ inability to read well. He said, “People don’t consider that the quality of thought is affected by a person’s ability to manipulate standard English. It is not merely a matter of learning how to write but also how to read. If students do not know standard English they are not going to understand what is written.”

Another faculty member who wished to remain anonymous said that he does not believe the literature teachers are not inclined to teach a basic composition course.

Literature faculty members approached by the New Paper declined to comment.

Faculty changes TBC policy

The faculty voted to change their policy on tenure requirement on May 1 so that a written authorization from the student’s advisor and the Dean of Studies is now required. All work will now have to be completed by the first day of the following semester.

In the same meeting the faculty approved the Student Educational Policies Committee (SEPC) proposal to allow SEPC representatives to participate fully in all divisional matters except for discussion of student plans.

TBC’s will still be granted for medical reasons. One faculty member commented that the change tells students “If you don’t get your work in, get well.”

Dean of Faculty Don Brown introduced the resolution. He said, “Our intent is to make the process more bureaucratic.”

A proposed revision of the faculty handbook which would allow a professor a third-year contract instead of the customary tenure review after five years was referred to the Educational Policies Committee (EPC) after a long debate.

Faculty changes include the resolution to change the tenure requirement and a possible small liberal-arts college in the future. Brown commented on the committee’s suggestions for improvements.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) recently granted Bennington College accreditation for the next five years with the stipulation the college makes improvements in four areas which they consider problematic.

Dean of Faculty, Don Brown explained that according to NEASC rules, a college may be accredited for a maximum of 15 years, but the association is authorized to grant accreditation for any period of time less than 10 years.

The four areas of concern are the primary reason why the association granted Bennington College accreditation for five years rather than 10.

The major problems cited dealt primarily with the administration, fund-raising and records keeping. Lack of internal research (e.g., attendance studies), an unwillingness or inability to compare Bennington with other small liberal arts institutions, the lack of continuity in the administration, and the failure of the Board of Trustees to raise money in support of the academic program were a few of the problems listed by the sub-committee of the association which visited Bennington College last fall.

Brown commented on the committee’s conclusions. He said, “We have done attention to studies. What I am not clear about is what kinds of studies they would like us to do which would inform policies.”

He elaborated on the question of Bennington comparing itself to other similar institutions. “This relates to the first problem,” Brown explained, “and has something to do with looking into how other schools handle budget distribution, health services, student concern, etc.

Brown conjectured that the committee’s complaint about fund-raising was not in reference to the current Capital Campaign but to the trustees’ previous attitude toward raising money.

Brown offered a second reason why the committee accredited Bennington for only five years. He explained, “The committee said ahead of time they were expecting to see more particular this time. This decision was in response to the federal government showing interest in becoming the accrediting agency.”

Brown, “These individuals are involved in other academic institutions and wanted to see that peer evaluation can be rigorous.”

Continued Brown, “Over the summer I will put together possible responses to the accrediting committee. The FEPC will be a primary committee in consideration of these matters.”
Opinion

The New Paper

Writing skills needed

The literary and language skills of incoming students have been on the decline for the last decade and is a widely recognized problem. In light of the national literacy problem, it can only be said that both philosophy and faculty are inexcusable. The most poorly prepared students in literature courses are now referred to as "rotating" positions that have been established in other divisions. This might be the last issue of the paper. Brown will be on leave for another year.

BY CYNTHIA BROWNING

Four Social Science professors are being considered for tenure this semester, according to Brown. Of the five, the Social Science division is the last year's reviews cannot be interpreted to indicate the probable outcome of the current cases. The areas reviewed for each faculty member include professional competence, professional activity and teaching effectiveness. The professor's contribution to the community and responsiveness to students will also be considered, Brown said.

The current policy dictates that first Social Science division, members considered for tenure, will only improve when the quality of the staff improves. It is the hope of the editor that those of students who have experience working on newspapers will elect to work on The New Paper next semester. We know that those students do exist. There are also students whose experience has been motivated and bright. These students are the ones who are the greatest disappointments. They have reasoned that "The New Paper" is not good enough for their talents. Our only answer to that is The New Paper will only improve when the quality of the staff improves.

Unfortunately, this increasing interest in non-academic pursuits has reflected a decrease in academic pursuits. There are few examples of students' growing interest in non-academic concerns. This is inexcusable. -A.S.
Spiotto talks about pageant

Q. Why did you enter the Miss Vermont Pageant?
A. Primarily because I was excited by the thought of picking up a scholarship in one fell swoop. Furthermore, I surmised that the thought of a beauty pageant turned me off quite a bit, but once I realized that this pageant was connected to the Miss America pageant, I felt that I just had to do and see what really goes on in when picking the reigning American beauty.

Q. What were the other girls like?
A. On the whole they were very sweet, hardworking, and talented. They represented, though, a definite mean, they were the average, the readiness, there was nothing exceptional about them at all. They were like the co-captains of the varsity co-ed squad.

Q. What was your toughest part of the competition and why?
A. The interview was the most challenging. To sit in a chair confronting eight judges facing extremely diverse questions at you, ranging from: "What was your grandfather’s name?" to "What do you want to accomplish in life?" and maintain your composure can be mind-boggling.

Q. Who are the judges?
The panel of judges consisted of four men and four women. Predominantly middle-aged, a few elderly. They represented the Miss America Board, who in turn represented corporations sponsoring the scholarships. Gillette, Ralston-Purina, Johnson and Johnson, Kellogg of Battle Creek.

Q. What were they looking for?
A. A girl, and I mean a girl, not a woman, of just enough personality, (but not too much) who can fittingly be presented to the America public as the girl-next-door whose life has been changed by the generous benevolence of America’s greatest capitalists.

Q. Could you elaborate on that?
A. Capitalists being among the greatest tycoons of America, these corporations are simply handing over millions of dollars to yet another make-believe icon in which to place their trust or belief.

Do you need to accomplish in life?" and maintain your composure can be mind-boggling.

Q. Was it a positive experience for you?
A. Of course, mainly because I reinforced my beliefs about the American myth of the young and the beautiful, which I frankly I can do without.

Spiotto is a senior majoring in art and literature, and currently is illustrating and writing a critical thesis on Goethe.

Iser speaks to parents and students concerning college finances

Business manager Bernie Iser addressed a group of parents and students on May 14 in the Dining Room. The talk entitled "Money: Where does it come from and where does it go to?" was part of the Parents’ Weekend activities.

Using rounded figures, Iser noted that the budget for the upcoming year is $4.9 million, which is an increase of about $300,000. Iser said, "The increase is in keeping with the trustees’ new five-year plan.

Philosopher selected

John Rajchman has been selected by the Social Science Division to fill their vacant position in Philosophy. Eight candidates were interviewed by the Search Committee composed of Dean of Faculty Don Brown, and Social Science Division professors Arnold Ricks, Anne Schlabach and Steven Harris. Rajchman will fill the place of Bill Schroeder now holds in Philosophy. Rajchman studied Continental Analytic Philosophy at Columbia University, and specializes in the works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida.

All three professors of philosophy now teaching at Bennington will be leaving in the next three years. Bill Schroeder departs at the end of this term. For his final year of contract, Steven Harris will be teaching part-time until June, 1979. Anne Schlabach plans to retire in June, 1981. Rajchman may become the senior faculty member of the Philosophy department at that time.

Charles Stevenson will teach as a guest professor next year to fill the half-time vacancy which is open because Steven Harris will only be teaching part-time. He will be a temporary position for one year only, and he will offer an introductory course in philosophy and a Aesthetic Analyisis class.

Iser said that in the present year, faculty salaries accounted for about one-third of the total expenditures which is $1.5 million, while food and maintenance costs a similar amount. As part of a program developed earlier this year with 30 other private colleges, Bennington will limit the growth of faculty and staff. Salary raises are 1/2% greater than the cost-of-living increase, which is 6%. Meanwhile, the college will hold operating costs at the cost-of-living and at the same time increase fees at a rate 2% greater than this federal index.

"The comprehensive fee would have been $800 for the upcoming year if no savings had been made during the current year," said Iser and he noted that over $300,000 had been saved on the maintenance operation.

Iser did not further elaborate on what steps had been initiated by the Murphy Administration to save money. He did say, however, that the cost of an education at Bennington is "enormous" from that of comparable institutions elsewhere, and that heating costs in the Northeast cause colleges here to be somewhat more expensive.

According to Iser, Bennington, like most institutions, participates no new major building program and "dressed a group of parents and students on the college finances. He stated that the administration anticipates no major new building program in the immediate future, specifically ruling out the possibility of a swimming facility. The type and size of the library collection will be studied. As Iser said, Iser will continue to cost the college $250,000 a year until the year 2007.

The pageant was won by Miss Lisa Volkert of Middlebury, Vt., a drama student at Castleton State College. Miss Spiotto did not place.

Student enters beauty contest

By Andrea Poole

Roxanne Spiotto, a second-term senior at Bennington College, competed in the annual Miss Vermont Pageant. This year’s pageant was held in the auditorium of the Middlebury Union High School, Middlebury, Vt., on the night of Friday, May 5.

The pageant was sponsored by the Middlebury Lions Club, was organized by local businessmen Mark Brady and Toni Neri. A preliminary competition had been held a week earlier at the Middlebury Inn, where 14 finalists were chosen from 30 entrants.

Four categories comprised the competition: talent, worth 50% of a contestant’s total score; swim suit, worth 25%; and the remaining 25% evenly divided between an evening gown competition and a preliminary seven-minute interview with the panel of judges. The evening’s presentation was interspersed with songs from Miss New Jersey 1977, Miss America 1973, and the reigning Miss Vermont.

The purpose of the pageant and the motivation of most of the girls who enter it, to showcasing the talents of the pageant and the kind of girl they look for is “a girl who is a free-thinker and a free-doer... someone who is a talented, articulate, and an attractive young person.”

The relevance of the bathing suit competition to talent and scholarship was explained by Bill Calzagi, one of the National Directors for the Miss America Pageant. He stated that the swim suit, while being a left-over from the bathing-beauty days of Atlantic City in the ’50s, was still important, as it “showed the woman. In keeping in mind that a healthy body goes with a healthy mind.” He also added that the swim suit competition was a test of poise, it being difficult to keep calm on high heels with very little clothing on and hundreds of eyes focused on you.

The pageant was won by Miss Lisa Volkert of Middlebury, Vt., a drama student at Castleton State College. Miss Spiotto did not place.

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The Dance Division's first concert of the spring was presented on May 9 and 10 in the Martha Hill Dance Workshop. The concert featured works by faculty members Anthony LaGiglia and Harry Sheppard, with two brief dances by students Tricia Anderson and Damelin Mujica.

The dances were not connected in any formal sense. Indeed, Sheppard's rather large scale work, requiring many dancers, was performed in a separate concert following the presentation of the first three dances. Sheppard's dance, "La Pompe: Musique Imagée par un Danseur," was performed in a separate concert on May 7, 1977. The work, conducted by Henry Brant and performed by the composer, with Jacob Glick, violinists and violins: Fincke, harpischord; William Peck, oboe; Richard Sacks, percussion and David Starobin, guitar, was based on a combination of a bluegrass go with 20th century contemporary style. Jaffe utilized the percussive aspect of the strings in the first two parts of the piece, which unified the diverse combination of instruments. The first two parts were based around a rhythmic interplay between the instruments with occasional long notes and glissandos played on the bowed instruments. The rhythmic patterns varied from fragmentation for special letters to more familiar bluegrass types.

Like LaGiglia, Sheppard made the most of simple day movements such as walking, sitting cross-legged, lying down, running, bending over, etc. He also relied heavily on constant repetition of these basic movements as well as constant repositioning of the dancers as they moved among one another on a green plastic stage. Occasionally the dancers sat in little "sewing circles" along the length of the stage making "conversational" utterances, also added some dimension to a piece in which the movements themselves lacked any purpose. But silliness and tedium rose to great heights when Sheppard descended the staircase at the end of the "stage" with his instrumentalists, straddled a long, white sheet of paper, scribbled on it for a few minutes and then proceeded to rip it up and throw the bits of paper on the floor of the dancers. Now really!

The "dancer-vocalists" performed diligently, if somewhat mechanically. When they did something other than walk or lie down the results were more interesting. Once or twice they were required to improvise a walk which each of them performed in turn. Their vocal utterances, also added some dimension to a piece in which the movements themselves lacked any purpose.

The accuracy and precision of the piece suffered.

Kirsten Joanna Vogelesang

"La Pompe: Musique Imagée par un Danseur"

LaGiglia, Sheppard, students present concert

The faculty-student concert on May 3 was divided in half. Two of the four works performed were student compositions, during which the attention of the audience was directed to the compositional aspect of the piece.

The concert opened with senior David Jaffe's piece, "Sunday at Brian's." The work, conducted by Henry Brant and performed by the composer, with Jacob Glick, violinists and violins: Fincke, harpischord; William Peck, oboe; Richard Sacks, percussion and David Starobin, guitar, was based on a combination of a bluegrass go with 20th century contemporary style. Jaffe utilized the percussive aspect of the strings in the first two parts of the piece, which unified the diverse combination of instruments. The first two parts were based around a rhythmic interplay between the instruments with occasional long notes and glissandos played on the bowed instruments. The rhythmic patterns varied from fragmentation for special letters to more familiar bluegrass types.

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Amy Spound
**Nahui Ocelot**

"Four Jaguar"

The sun perished first. By jaguars’ assault; Four moons today beyond shrouded. Beyond the thickest vine Came through, around. The ball of word witnessed. The sweat of motion Converge, converge, The end of sun comes, Opens the mountain’s vein:

- **Kingdom of snow**
- Darkening green, eternally
- Fearing its minute: record
- Light’s praise as though a vital truth were told, As though one purity Survives the dream It sanctifies:
- All new immortal symmetry
- The soul’s sole vital image, One twilight of motion
- In which all flesh first Weighs its song simple As a sun’s return.

**Nahui Ehecatl**

"Four Wind"
The second sun perished

By a great wind, its chaos Turned men into monkeys, Their shriveled flesh Matted with courser hairs:
- To begin again, to search
- Main sloughed out from nature’s Womb, or enter their women, Busy by their inner torso Flows (that swallow each Pause in primal tavern, (I): To enable their thick- Shelled nuts with teeth, To jump and scream Their imperturbability Against a sky wearing Nightfall, or down To dance naked and feel

- The dark bone deep.

**Nahui Quiahuilh**

"Four Rain"
The third sun perished

By a rain of fire
- Song of first drizzle
- Drying the dew among In my chaos, and I sleep.
- Children with coal-oven faces; And if a dream divides
- These people also left
- Igniting the lush earth. Shatter, all forgeries of sense
- More than a trace of shadow
- Forearm and chisel and mallet
- To kill the sun, and to build the wall of word and light.

**All’s Well goes well**

Most everything went well for once when the drama division of Bennington College presented William Shakespeare’s “All’s Well That Ends Well” as a musical. The Drama Workshop on May 11 through May 14.

Directed by faculty member David Schweizer, who has been associated in the past with Joseph Papp’s New York Shakespeare Festival, the production moved swiftly, for the most part, toward the pretentious theatrical posturing so prevalent in Bennington College dramatic presentations, especially those directed by students.

Not that there was not a lot of theatrical posturing in this particular production. At least the grand gestures, the stereotypical characters and the exaggerated environment in which the actors merrily romped were all intentional and not pomposus in the least. Unfortunately, this light-hearted comedy by Shakespeare seemed too light-headed and careless at times, qualities perpetrated by an overuse of baroque techniques and an overemphasis of Shakespeare’s sexual innuendos.

Subtlety was not the forte of the production. Schweizer took advantage of all possible sexual inference in the language, through hand and facial gestures. Helena, played by Ellen Maxted, confided her love to illusory anguish as she gazed ardently at her reluctant would-be husband Bertram, Count of Rossilion, performed aggressively in a play on the breast of the storm.

For their opening number the band, playing a tune called “Song for my Father” by Horace Silver which they repeated for their closing number. They also performed tunes by Miles Davis, Germs, Cowrie, Coltrane, Col Porter and Chick Corea.

The tight rhythm section the band members were evident and their mutual appreciation gave an extemporaneous structure to the music which was definitely one of their best points.

Guest star Andy Messinger dropped exhilarating trumpet solos, and played with such musical sensitivity that his potentially dominating brass never overrode the character of the cocao.

Flautist Peter Beck, demonstrated his range as a performer by playing a myriad of different tone qualities, strongly atmospheric but never flamboyant and cold. Occasionally, offered riffs laced with that surely associated with his instrument. Guitarist Bob Levin played consistently and cleanly. He is a musician who can blend with others as well as fire and ad-lib passages with much personality and force.

Sharen Connors, the coco vocalist was a shimmering presence in the rhythm section. Her lyrical soprano dropped occasionally to a barely lower register. The band had almost characteristic of a man.

While other musicians were taking five, Ed Buller’s bass line served as the basis for both percussion and bass. During the evening, Buller played acoustic as well as electric bass. His ability is founded in his interest in the bass. He makes demanding technical requirements seem effortless.

**Cosco Tasso premiers at Svaha**

The sun weekend festivities culminated in the Svaha Cafe. For their opening number the band, playing a tune called “Song for my Father” by Horace Silver which they repeated for their closing number. They also performed tunes by Miles Davis, Germs, Cowrie, Coltrane, Col Porter and Chick Corea.

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The sun weekend festivities culminated on Saturday evening with the student band "Coco Tasso" making its premierer at the Svaha Cafe.

For their opening number the band, played a tune called "Song for my Father" by Horace Silver which they repeated for their closing number. They also performed tunes by Miles Davis, Germs, Cowrie, Coltrane, Col Porter and Chick Corea.

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Bishop, Calisher, Matthews read

The recent readings given by Elizabeth Bishop, Margaret Atwood, and Stephen Calisher "are the writer's search for a mode in which language, symbol and emotion can capture the reality behind the pure facts," and sometimes "genuine again;" it was a relief to hear a contemporary writer for whom prose is more than "a vehicle for showing a writer's intellectual qualifications for a subject." But if Calisher's reading was a relief, Matthews' was sheer delight. Having been in Brazil at the beginning of this month, he wrote: "Having fun and..."

Matthews began with a piece published last fall in Atlantic, a satire first and foremost a satire on the "real thing," and the too-fanciful interpretation of critics applied equally well to either genre. But the parody was of the sort that will succeed in itself. Matthews' joke was first and foremost a joke; the satire first and foremost a satire on the culinary communiser and thereby it more perfectly portrayed the absurdity of the literary counterpart. The heavy weight of tradition, formalising the question of what a writer must be present to certify an artifact as "art" and the local interpretation of critics applied equally well to either genre. But the parody was of the sort that will succeed in itself. Matthews' joke was first and foremost a joke; the satire first and foremost a satire on the culinary communiser and thereby it more perfectly portrayed the absurdity of the literary counterpart.

..After a short intermission, Matthews read "The Wood Weasel." The poem was rich in tonality, the result of the construction of V AP A. The prints were rich in tonality, the result of the construction of V AP A. The Zone System is a method of exposure which allows the photographer to design photographs which reflect the actual tones of a subject, rich blacks to brilliant whites. This is a close attempt to shape and shape cues, giving more presence of the third dimension than is usually seen in student work. Her photographs of works talking to her while a break included one man holding a pole—a pole which was the saltation. Her still-life work of the tools and materials of the craft shows the confidence of a professional. But people are not things. People see the lens of a camera before themselves and smile, and all expression off their faces, or turn away.

Joy Davis exhibits photos of furniture factory workers

Few travelers notice the Mountain Furniture Factory as they drive on Route 6A through North Bennington. The heavy weight of tradition for object, and sometimes with the writer's intellectual qualifications for a subject—

Murphy addresses parents

President Joseph S. Murphy spoke in the auditorium on the morning of Sunday, May 14, as part of a series of presentations offered during Parents' weekend.

"The college will not become larger and will retain its current 9:1 student/faculty ratio. This ratio is one of the "near future" of the college. He added, "No new buildings will be added, as the college will be in debt until the year 2003 as a result of the construction of V AP A."

Murphy hinted that if any additions were to be made in the near future, the building library would receive high priority.

Murphy also discussed the endowment. He said, "By 1980 the college will have sufficient capital." He remarked that Bennington College will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1980.

As for Bennington's fiscal soundness in the future, Murphy explained, "Some of the alumni belong to the wealthiest families in the country and are dependent upon middle and upper-middle class families."

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Psychological counselors fit approach to situation

By the end of classes this term, more than one out of every five Bennington College students will have seen a Psychological Counselor. Though students come in for many different reasons, Director of the Psychological Counseling office, Barbara Finlayson says, "We don't have people coming in who aren't serious.

The number of students visiting the counseling office reflects, at least in part, the pressure of the semester. From the beginning of the term, the load of each counselor builds. Mid-term sees a rapid increase in the counselors' workloads, but the greatest increase comes when classes are concluding. Finlayson notes that "the end of term can be absolutely horrendous with people coming in -- it even happens with seniors coming in the week before they graduate." She adds, "This is all right, it may take until the end of the term for a student to realize that he needs to come.

One of the more common problems of students is the relation of academics to lifestyle, simply because of the difficulty of class work. Counselor Arleen LaBella says, "Sometimes people come in because they're not functioning by other people's standards and their own. Other people come in because they don't see themselves as functioning well.

Crisis among friends also bring in students, as do difficult relations with the family. Finlayson says students may come home from school to a divorce, for many marriages only survive until the children leave for school. The divorce can destroy the secure home base which people often rely on while at college.

Not all students come to the office with a specific problem. LaBella explains, "People come in here because they want to. Sometimes they don't know why they feel badly, but they do." Students with adjustment problems often seek help; many of these people tend to drop away as they become more secure. Freshmen and transfer students may want to talk because they "are not feeling particularly ourselves" at being at Bennington," says Finlayson.

Infrequently, students will come to the counseling office for years. Serious, long-term cases are more often referred to more intensive help. When students derive, the service can refer them to therapists in the area where they will be over summer or NHT. The office is filling a book with the names of professional friends and contacts who have helped Bennington students. Many times, the office will find a public mental health clinic so that students who cannot pay professional fees can get assistance.

Serious cases which require a student's leaving campus are rare. Perhaps once a year, Finlayson says, "Students have had complete breakdowns and had to be hospitalized for a time. But there has never been a suicide on campus. The statistical records nationwide show that this is surprising. Finlayson admits, "We don't know what has to be done. One of the things that helps, for this is certainly an intense place for students, is the NRT break."

Students only see their counselors as long as they wish to. Ordinarily, the office "sort of contracts for sessions from term to term." When students ask to be excused from sessions, this is agreed to; sometimes a person says this only because therapy has become threatening. When the latter may be happening, or when a counselor is concerned because a student may commit suicide or run away, Finlayson says "we usually do worry." Only in the most extreme circumstances will the counselors intervene if the student is in their own home.

Finlayson says, "We don't contact parents unless there has been a breakdown or suicide attempt. We do, and tell the students that we'll do so: they've never refused to go along. But this is the only time when information is released without written permission of the student. The office does not actually keep regular files on students. Statistical records are kept on the number of times a student visits the office each term, while the counselors keep personal notes which are not the property of the school for their own use.

In addition to offering individual counseling, the Psychological Counseling office has provided two group therapy situations for Bennington students this term. Counselor Arleen LaBella has run a group on Assertiveness Training, while Counselor David Schoerdel brought the house chairmen together "to create a forum in which students in responsible positions have an informal opportunity to discuss student problems."

Though there is no policy requiring this, groups have been a service of the office for the last six or seven years. The groups have generally been successful, according to Director Barbara Finlayson, and some have lasted as long as two years. Finlayson says, "What they tell us to mainly are interpersonal relationships."

The groups are designed for students who feel uncomfortable in social situations. "We don't exclude people on the basis of our judgment that they are healthy enough to do without counseling," explains Finlayson.

The counselors attempt to remain flexible with the possibilities for group sessions. Finlayson says they would try to provide something for a group of students, perhaps a suite, who wished to be counseled as a group.

Students come to the groups from two main sources. Persons seeing a counselor individually are sometimes asked to join a group. Other times, the group decides to include new members and a notice is placed in College Week.

Schoerdel's work with the House Chairmen represents a new role for the Counseling office, for he says "it's a consultation group, not therapy. He thinks that there is a changing perception of the role of House Chairmen, and provides time for the students to use as they wish. The office of simply viewing themselves as Student Council representatives, Schoerdel believes some House Chairmen to be a reality-reinforcer - therapy gets painful at times."

Jane Burkhardt has a little different role than the others in the counseling office. As the office secretary, she handles much of the paper work of the office. But she sees very few students regularly as most of her time is kept open for drop-in requests for counseling. Perhaps because she is at the office for a few hours each week, though, she has found that this happens relatively infrequently.

The students Burkhardt might see on a walk-in basis are those who have not been seeing another counselor. She says, "Hopefully, they'll feel better -- not be as upset -- after they've talked to somebody." While this is not always possible, Burkhardt attempts to calm students who ask for immediate counseling, so that they can deal with their problems.

Most students seeking a counselor have regular weekly appointments for one hour. Students having some kind of emotional crisis may come in more often. In a crisis situation, the student's counselor gives out his home telephone number. Sometimes talking on the phone will relax an upset person; other times the counselor offers to come over in an emergency.
Elizabeth Bishop speaks about her poetry

By Ellen McNamah

Elizabeth Bishop and I met for breakfast and for an interview the morning after her reading at the college. In the course of discussing whether or not the blueberry pancakes were good, we discovered a common interest in the Maine islands. From there on our conversation centered around tales of our summer adventures, sailing and living on the Cape and in Maine.

I have transcribed those parts that I hope reveal most about the poet and her poetic voice.

Q. I understand that you interviewed T.S. Eliot when you were a student at Vassar. How did that interview come about?

A. It was very funny. I was on the newspaper and I think I was a sophomore. I don't know why I was on the newspaper, but I was all the time. I used to go to the meetings, although I didn't really do all that much news—it took a lot of time.

The office had a big long table that we would all sit around while different people wrote different things. I used to desert the meetings almost immediately and go across the street to a place called "The Popover Shop." There I would sit and write these awful brief humorous bits, or editorials, or poems—funny poems.

I think the editor-in-chief, Eleanor Clark's sister, very nobly thought that because I had published a couple of poems I should be the one to interview Eliot. I was absolutely scared to death—just sick. I got rather dressed up. I can just see it: I had on a summer suit that I wore with spectator sport shoes. I was a blazing hot day, just terrible. At the time the honorable guests were put up in Andrew Vassar's suite. It was full of wonderful old Victorian stilt. Eliot and I sat on a horse hair sofa. I remember my legs were too short and I kept sliding off the sofa. He kept undoing his tie, which for all very well, but there is no reason for one's temperament. I suppose. Some women certainly can write like Emily Dickinson there where may be some women whose experiences are much more limited, but that does not really matter — there is Emily Dickinson, as one always says. You just have to make do with what you have after all.

It depends on one's temperament I suppose. Some women certainly can write like Emily Dickinson—

where there may be some women who are trying terribly hard to get me to say something pre-feminist or anti-feminist. Possibly because I was well received when I was young, for I feel that I have not written as much as I might have if I had been a man.

Q. Do you feel that there is something in a woman's perception of life as an observer that makes her poetry different from a man's?

A. Women's experiences are much more limited, but that does not really matter—there is Emily Dickinson, as one always says. You just have to make do with what you have after all.

It depends on one's temperament I suppose. Some women certainly can write like Emily Dickinson—

where there may be some women who are trying terribly hard to get me to say something pre-feminist or anti-feminist. Possibly because I was well received when I was young, for I feel that I have not written as much as I might have if I had been a man.

Q. Do you think that there is one particular poem that carries the full range of your voice?

A. I don't know. Who am I to say? Most poems, if you like them, finally add up to say more than you realize. I think that everyone, when he publishes his first book, or even later, thinks that these poems are all very well, but there is no reason for course, critics find the most extraordinary philosophies that never could have occurred to you when you wrote the poem.

Q. Do you think that the Latin and Greek you studied in college affected your poety?

A. Latin probably. I had an excellent teacher while was at Vassar. I remember sitting for a couple of years on Monday mornings and writing Latin prose from English prose. I was not a very good student in college, I was always distracted, but I do think that Latin is probably the best writing exercise I can think of.

Evelyn Waugh has a very good passage in his first autobiography about the value of translation both ways—from a dead language to live ones. Through translation you learn that certain words mean things and they have to be in certain places in a sentence to be effective.

Q. Ben Bedell teaches one of the Verse Workshops here at Bennington College. How well do you know him?

A. Oh yes. I think I have known Ben for a number of years. I knew him from Key West. My memories go back further than his do. The first year he was there I remember him walking down the sidewalk in the early morning and telling me: "I have written 40 lines this morning." Now he says that he never said such a thing. Well, he did. He said that he wrote 40 lines every day. I was just dumb-founded.

Q. How often do you write?

A. Some days all I do is write and then for months I don't write a thing.