

Bennington Today

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SENIOR YEAR AT BENNINGTON

Seniors spend their last year at Bennington bringing their education to its zenith. They work closely with a faculty member in their division either writing a thesis (creative, critical, analytical, research, or translations); working on projects such as drama productions (acting, directing, designing); performing dance and music concerts (choreographing, composing, and performing); hanging shows (painting, drawing, graphics, sculpture, ceramics, photography); or doing research and experiments in science and mathematics. These projects enable seniors to prove their abilities and push their knowledge and experience to the utmost. A sample of senior theses follows.

Bret Ellis, a Literature and Languages major, wrote a creative thesis, a collection of short stories, entitled *This Term's Model*.

Ellis, author of *Less Than Zero* (Simon and Schuster 1985), said his thesis, "gave me the freedom to work on a whole body of work rather than one story at a time." Ellis also used this time to develop new material.

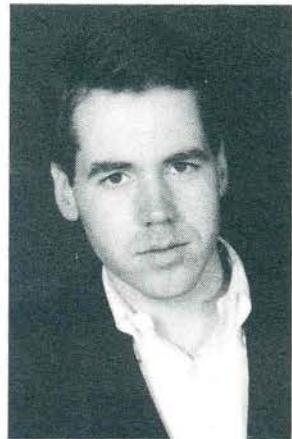
Ellis has used his writing skills to write for magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Elle*. He has also appeared on talk shows in the States and in England to promote his first novel. He will head back to L.A. after graduation to write scripts for actor Rob Lowe, ("St. Elmo's Fire," "Outsiders," "Youngblood") and finish his second novel.

Gina Harrell, a Social Science major with a minor concentration in video/film, made a documentary entitled, "The Percys of North Bennington, Vermont: A Documentary."

The Percy family business, Percy's Newsroom, (which also serves as a taxi/limousine service) is located in the heart of North Bennington where Harrell lived. She chose a family that is a part of the history of North Bennington and still central to the community. She also wanted to choose a family that hadn't had a lot of documentation like some of the better known, upper-crust families.

Harrell taped interviews with the Percys, then shot footage. She also researched North Bennington at the local library to fit the pieces together.

"I wanted to get closer to the place I've been living



Dan Long



Ralph Alswang

for the past four years," Harrell said. "I felt that there was a gap between the College and the surrounding community. After I finished my project, I felt that it made my experience living here richer. It was good to be able to study people in more than one medium—using film, interviewing, audio, and my own research gave me a fuller story."

Harrell has used her video/film abilities in past internships and plans to do projects in film after graduation. She will be working in L.A. on a music video with a story board she collaborated on for a popular recording artist, and then will go to New York City to work on a commercial for a children's shoe store.

Sara Pinto, an interdivisional major in Visual Arts/Literature and Languages, wrote a creative thesis, entitled, *Bomb Plans*.

Pinto transferred from art school to Bennington to get a good liberal arts education and pursue her studies in art. She was encouraged to write after a professor read her first story, and since then has taken several creative writing courses.

"Writing a thesis made me become aware of my narrative voice," Pinto said. "I learned that each story I wrote complemented the others, and I ended up with a cohesive body of work; all of the stories created a tone as a whole."

For the visual arts portion of her major, she hung a show of her paintings. "I can't imagine having just done painting or just writing. I think this worked out perfectly for me."

After graduation, Sara plans to spend the summer writing on a farm in northern Vermont. In the fall, she will be moving to Sante Fe, New Mexico to freelance in design and continue her writing.

Betsy Treitler, a Social Science major specializing in politics, wrote a thesis evaluating press coverage of foreign policy and dilemmas in politics. She focused on the press coverage of the governmental decision not to let the Shah of Iran stay in the U.S. after he was exiled.

Her thesis was purely research, and a first study for this case. She worked with her thesis tutor, Mansour Farhang, former Iranian Ambassador to the U.N. under Bani-Sadr. Farhang pushed her "to her limits" and was instrumental in her research.



Ralph Alswang



Ralph Alswang

DANCING TO ITS OWN TUNE*

As clear northern lights pour into their huge studio, eight young dancers stretch and flex and tumble through a modern-dance piece that one of them has composed. Not all their legs are long, not all their torsos are honed to muscular perfection. But that isn't really the point at Bennington College. "We're not looking for technicians the way that another school like Juilliard might," says Barbara Roan, a dance instructor and choreographer.

"Since the emphasis is on choreography, we don't necessarily look for students who can put their feet above their heads." However polished their performances may become, what students cherish most is the artistic challenge that Bennington affords. "I thought you had to be some very accomplished dancer and then you could do choreography," says 20 year-old Audrey Kindred. "I hadn't even entertained the possibility of being allowed to do this kind of thing."

Bennington's most lasting - and deserved - reputation grew around its dedication to modern dance. It was the first liberal-arts college to create a dance major; the school's first president, Robert Devore Leigh, recruited former Martha Graham dancer Martha Hill to lead its program. "It was inspiring to have an academic institution believe in the arts at that time," Hill recalled recently.

If Bennington's commitment is historical, its facilities are strictly up-to-date. Dancers have virtual 24-hour access to two 40-foot by 50-foot studios. The dance department boasts its own showcase, the Martha Hill Dance Workshop - a 100-foot by 100-foot "black box" theater in which the audience space and the "sprung floor" stage (built with overlapping layers of wood, which is kinder to dancers' legs than wood laid on concrete) are not fixed, allowing greater production flexibility. Bennington also has impressive creative resources. Music students frequently compose pieces for the dance, and design students offer their assistance on lighting, costuming and sets.

Talking about their work, legs crossed in front of them or stretched out behind them, the student dancers seem as secure in their abilities as they are comfortable with their bodies. Asked if they expect to join dance groups upon graduation, many recoil from the suggestion, then declare that, no, they hope to start their own companies. With such uninhibited ambitions they are, quite literally, following in the footsteps of Bennington's many proud pioneers.

Marilyn Achiron

*Condensed from *Newsweek*. Copyright 1986



Dancers Ned Triggs and Hope Clark

Seniors Continued

Treitler said her thesis "gave me the opportunity to do a substantive piece of research in depth a topic that I am very interested in. I also was able to use the wide range of information that I've gained through the years."

She was also able to incorporate her studies into work outside the College. "Going into the real world you have to rely on yourself and go through different channels. This taught me how to handle myself and go after what I need to get." Treitler has used her abilities working for the Nassau County District Attorney's Office and Schenectady Mayor Karen Johnson.

After graduation she will be attending graduate school at NYU to study Journalism/Communications.



Susan Alan Craig

Freshman Liza Mueller at Voice of America in Washington, D.C.

FIELD WORK TERM

For over fifty years Bennington College has required an off-campus, two-month semester of work called Field Work Term (FWT). Designed to test and develop both the skills and ideas learned in the course of one's studies, this program takes place in January and February between the two academic semesters.

Beginning in the freshman year, students secure jobs with the help of the Placement Office which carries more than two positions per student. Ruth Engleman, a freshman from Montclair, NJ, describes the process: "FWT 1986 began much earlier than January first. Pre-FWT was an experience in itself. A blind search, then a find... I found myself on the insane but exciting streets of New York City." Ruth also found herself quite busy working two jobs—one with Sullivan and Brugnatelli, a small advertising agency and the other with The American Committee on Africa.

Seniors find FWT helpful in solidifying career choices. French major Nancy Morowitz, who worked as a trial assistant for the Public Defender Service in Washington, D.C., said, "My last FWT was the best. Not only did I make important decisions concerning my future, but I felt that the work I did was appreciated." This fall Nancy will be attending Tulane Law School in New Orleans.

Regular FWT employers include the New York Philharmonic, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Bell Labs, Fortune and Money magazines, Capital Repertory Theatre, Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the Maria Mitchell Observatory on Nantucket.



Sculptor Chris Duncan and Painter Philip Wofford

BENNINGTON COLLEGE ARTISTS HONORED

For the second consecutive year, two Bennington College faculty members have won fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation for outstanding work in their field. Philip Wofford, a painter, and Christopher Duncan, a sculptor, are this year's winners. Last year's winners were Arturo Vivante for writing and Brower Hatcher for sculpture. Awards are given in all the areas of the arts and humanities on the basis of demonstrated accomplishment in the past and strong promise for the future.

Wofford has taught at Bennington since 1969. He is a widely exhibited abstract painter whose work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum in New York City and other museums. "The primary purpose of the awards is to enable professional scholars and artists to pursue their work unimpeded for a year," Wofford said. "I intend to continue my painting. This will enable me to afford studio space in New York City while still teaching here."

Duncan, a technical assistant in sculpture at the College, is building a reputation through progressively more frequent exhibitions. The fellowship assures, Duncan said, "a year for developing ideas and sketches I have had to set aside for lack of concentrated time."



Faculty Poets Stephen Sandy and Mary Ruefle

SPRING POETRY READINGS

The Literature Division has given audience this spring to three fine readings from four vastly different poets.

Setting the tone for the entire series, Bennington's own Mary Ruefle and Stephen Sandy offered their reactions to the local landscape and its attendant universal implications, and of man's place in that scheme. Both used the historical and spiritual aspects of New England as background for human endeavor.

Sandy:

All the branches against night
straining to hold
to the null cold and final star...

Ruefle:

I have become an orchid
washed in on the salt white beach.
Memory,
what can I make of it now
that it might please you -
this life, already wasted
and still strewn with miracles?

On April 17, Richard Kenney read primarily from his recent collection, *Orrery*. The themes of the poems (passage of time, cyclical and linear movement, growth, decay) necessitated, as Kenney explained in his introduction, a rapid delivery, so that the listener had no chance to lie back and contemplate a line. It was a wholly new and rewarding poetic and auditory experience.

On May 1, Bennington was graced with the presence of John Ashbery. Reading from his *Selected Poems*, his recent collection *The Waves*, and from new and unpublished works, Ashbery induced about as many varying reactions as Vermont has new leaves. One had the feeling that he himself was finding new meanings in the poems even as he read them. Often fused with humor, the poems also approached grand themes from varying angles, alighting upon truths, as it were, from behind. He addressed, finally, "pleasure we cannot and will not escape."

The Literature Division has made sure that good poetry is one pleasure that the College will not lack.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Students, faculty and administrators all share in the responsibility for effective community government at Bennington. And as Dave Maddalena, current student council president remarks, "The size of Bennington makes it almost impossible not to get involved in on-campus issues." Perhaps the most vital political units of the College are the fifteen on-campus houses where the issues of most direct concern to students (noise levels, social functions, etc.) are debated and voted upon during Sunday Evening Coffee Hour.

Houses also elect a representative to serve on Student Council which makes recommendations on administrative policy and community life. Standing committees include housing, health, judicial, recreation, film and sports. The content and quality of student life is the main concern of these committees. The sports committee, for example, schedules all athletic contests while the film committee brings two features to campus each week.

Academic concerns are addressed by the Student Educational Policies Committee (SEPC) and the College-wide Academic Council, to which three student members are elected. The SEPC collects evaluations from each class to assist in the faculty review process. Academic Council, meanwhile, addresses curricular matters, such as the structure of degree requirements, as well as College-wide budgetary issues.

As the above suggests, opportunities to create the character of a college education abound at Bennington. The challenge to each entering class is to seize them.

COMMUNITY STUDIES

This spring marked the inception of the Community Studies Program at Bennington College. Funded by a grant from the Exxon Education Foundation, the program uses the disciplines of political science, history, anthropology and economics to put students in touch with the issues they are most likely to face after graduation: education, taxation, land use and political power. The initial course offering, "Research Methods in Community Studies," is team taught by historian, Stephen MacFarlane and political scientist, Gail Russell. Case studies ranging from 17th century England to 20th century Boston teach students to do research from scratch using archives, letters, and photographs. Final projects will engage students in original research on selected New England towns.

Whether taking a course in community studies or not, there is the greater Bennington community to explore. Faculty and student activities illustrate: Scott Morrison '87 is project assistant for the 2010 Committee, a group of business and civic leaders exploring options for the town of Bennington as it faces the next 25 years; Sally Sugarman of the Social Science faculty directs the Bennington College Early Childhood Center serving 80 families in the area; Melody Swett '87 works on a bi-weekly publication announcing College events to greater Bennington; Iliana Filby '89 hosts a weekly radio broadcast on WHGC, the local station; and Lou Calabro, faculty composer, conducts four performances each year of the Sage City Symphony, a community based orchestra.



Ralph Alswang

Sunday Evening Coffee Hour at Swann House

NEW CONNECTIONS WITH BANK STREET AND BROWN

Brown University and Bank Street College of Education, New York, have endorsed two Bennington programs by offering joint degrees with Bank Street and provisional acceptance for an MD at Brown.

The five-year program with Bank Street is preparation for early childhood-elementary or junior high teaching. It leads to a BA from Bennington, an MS from Bank Street and recommendation for teaching accreditation.

In common, the two schools have been guided by the principles of John Dewey and stress student initiative in developing individualized programs. There are also useful differences. Sally Sugarman, director of Bennington's Early Childhood Center, notes "the opportunities to study and teach in both rural and urban situations, and to teach at a variety of age levels."

The first three years will include early childhood studies with liberal arts at Bennington. A fourth year at Bank Street, plus two summers, will concentrate on child development studies and education methods and problems. Fifth-year students will complete a combined senior and master's thesis at Bennington.

The agreement with Brown University points up the reputation of Bennington's small, select postbaccalaureate program in medicine and allied health sciences. Intensive courses taught by the natural science-mathematics faculty qualify career changers for medical, dental or veterinary schools. Those admitted will now be considered for early provisional acceptance as MD candidates in Brown's Program in Medicine. It is expected that at least two places will be available annually at Brown for outstanding candidates completing the Bennington program.

The association enhances the Bennington program's already excellent placement record in U.S. medical schools. Faculty member Elizabeth Sherman says, "We're especially pleased with the association because of the common interest in putting older students onto a new professional career track."

HIGHLIGHTS OF SPRING DRAMA

The Drama Division staged nine productions this spring semester, all but one student-directed. Perhaps the most ambitious productions were of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Bertolt Brecht's *Baal*.

Titus Andronicus is the young Shakespeare's sporadically brilliant experiment in revenge tragedy, a popular genre of his time. One of his earliest plays, it is thought by a great many of his critics, to be one of his worst as well. T.S. Eliot called it, "one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written." Excepting a notable production in 1957 with Laurence Olivier as Titus, the play is rarely performed, frightening away both directors and academics with its multitude of problems. All the more reason, faculty director Nicholas Martin thought, the play should be performed at Bennington.

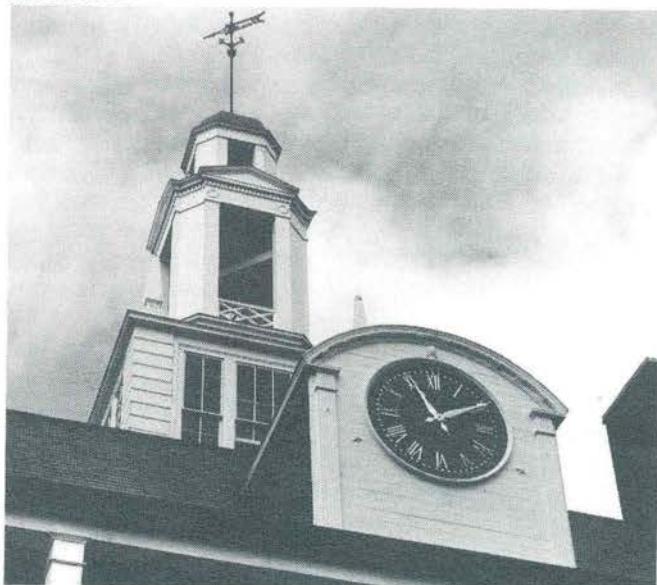
Martin was able to utilize a large number of students fresh from a term in London where they studied classical acting technique at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. Featuring a cast of 25, the play achieved a haunting effect through the stark sets and costumes of Anne Kenney, harsh light of Erik Holmberg and original music composed on a Synclavier by Antony Widoff.

The play takes place in a Rome described by Shakespeare as a "wilderness of tigers." Taking the idea of Rome on the verge of collapse and exchanging it for a post-apocalyptic world, Martin developed a setting comparable to that depicted in *The Road Warriors*.

Technically a difficult and elaborate production, the play featured motorcycles dragging actors on stage and fork lifts raising the victorious Titus high above the audience. Several realistic deaths required gallons of stage blood and precision timing. All worked to produce delight in the audience as villains received their due, and disbelief that the hero could possibly endure the continually surprising turn of events.

Baal - Live!!, a musical adaptation of Brecht's *Baal* directed by senior Lauren Axelrod, borrowed from the film genre of Rock Opera seen in such movies as *Tommy*, *The Wall* and *Purple Rain*. Axelrod was curious to see whether or not it would be possible to communicate

both the plot and emotion of Brecht's original story of a young man for whom no amount of pleasure was ever enough. The resulting production employing 25 actors, singers, dancers and musicians proved both accessible and entertaining. The enthusiasm generated spontaneous clapping and even a bit of dancing in the aisle from the audience. Judging from the play's success, Bennington may see more rock operas or musicals in the future.



APPLICATIONS COMING

Applications for the fall of 1987 have arrived and will be mailed this month. Students are encouraged to make a campus visit part of the application process. The College is prepared to accommodate overnight visits in the fall and personal interviews throughout the year. Students unable to make it to campus can usually schedule an alumni interview near their hometown. To insure sufficient knowledge of the College, an interview, on or off-campus, is required. Peter Richardson, Director of Admissions, welcomes questions and additional inquiries at (802) 442-5401.



Cast of *Titus Andronicus* with director Nicholas Martin in center.

FACULTY NOTES

Performances

In honor of **Louis Calabro's** (Music) 60th birthday the Vermont Symphony will play his Third Symphony this summer; **Barbara Roan** (Dance) performed for three nights in New York's St. Mark's Church recently; and **Maxine Newman** (Cello) and **Jacob Glick** (Viola) played in the Composers' Forum's Fiftieth Anniversary Gala Retrospective at Carnegie Hall this winter.

Travels

Ronald Cohen (Psychology) will present a paper and chair a symposium on Justice and Interpersonal Relations this summer at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands and **Jacob Glick** (Music) spent two months in China recently, teaching and performing at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Awards

The National Institute of Health awarded **John Fahey** (Biology) a grant of \$46,526 this year to research "The Effect of Bradykinnin on Macrophage Proliferation" and **Jose Cordova** (Spanish) will participate in a summer seminar on "Comparative Poetics" at Princeton University through a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Publications & Exhibits

"Blue-Red Spangle," a ceramic piece by **Jane Ford Aebersold** was shown recently at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; **Ben Belitt's** (Literature) *Possessions: New and Selected Poems, 1938-1985* will appear this year from Godine's of Boston; **Ken Kensing** (Anthropology) published a chapter in *South American Indian Languages* on the University of Texas Press this year; and **Pat Adams** (Painting) recently completed "Mattering," a painting commissioned by TRW, Inc. for their headquarters in Lundhurst, Ohio.

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