

JUN 6 1973

June 4, 1973

TO: The Joint Committee of
Trustees, Faculty and Students, + Mrs. Emmet + Mr. Carter

FROM: Kate Merck, with David Malamut's help

SUBJECT: Notes of Meeting on May ²⁰19, 1973

The trustee members (Kay Murray, David Malamut and Kate Merck) of the Joint Committee arrived at the college at suppertime on May 19th, planning to spend all day Sunday and part of Monday working on our assignment. It turned out that the faculty part of the committee had only two members (Ron Cohen and Bill Dixon). We had thought there were going to be three, that no students had been named and that there was no way we could meet Sunday A.M. We tried to adapt to this unexpected situation. The following are minutes of the one meeting we had, which was not a meeting of the Joint Committee, as it had not really formed. This meeting was at 12:30 P.M., Sunday, at the Parker's house.

PRESENT:

Trustees	-	Kay Murray, David Malamut, Kate Merck
Faculty	-	Ron Cohen
Students	-	Leslie Lowe Terry Huggins Roberta Hunter Jimmy Means Philemona Williamson Henry Cannes
Administration	-	Janice Prior

The first subject for conversation was the apparent problem Bemington was experiencing in securing new black faculty. Leslie pointed out the existence of a double standard for black and white faculty members - that Bemington demands a special "calling card" of black faculty which has never been asked of whites. What followed was a general discussion of the problem of hiring new black faculty where divisions of the college did not feel the urgency of the problem. It was stated that student recommendations are never heeded. The conclusion of the discussion was that a faculty which felt no commitment to this problem would not take steps to improve the situation on a simple "recommendation" and therefore that the committee should have power requisite with the achievement of its goals. Thus issued a long discussion on the subject of "clout".

Kate brought up the necessity of having a third faculty committee member named who would represent older members of the faculty with long association with the college. Ron also attempted to describe the importance of having key faculty on the committee. It was stated that a committee composed only of those people initially concerned with the problems of black students would not change things in the least. It was suggested that Lionel be a member of the committee. Finally after some argument, pro and con, it was concluded that Gail also should be on the committee itself.

The committee then went on to discuss in greater detail the problem of faculty hiring at Bennington vis a vis black candidates. Philemona suggested that divisions be approached separately in regard to this problem. Kay agreed, stating that although the administration allocates the number of positions to be filled, it is the responsibility of the divisions as autonomous bodies to fill them.

An attempt to broaden discussion was then made. The committee approached the problem of "courses of study". Students were concerned with the information black faculty could offer. It was pointed out that a course taught by present faculty on black subjects would effectively change nothing, that the problem of courses was reducible to that of hiring black faculty. Roberta suggested it be insisted that particular divisions hire a certain number of black faculty and that if they failed to do so, they be denied the salary money commensurate with each position.

Students continued to enlarge on the problems they encountered at Bennington as blacks. Living at Bennington was said to be a continual "hassle". "Hassle" appeared to be the modus operandi at Bennington College. This operation was associated closely with the "passing of the buck". It was suggested that perhaps this was the case for whites as well as blacks, but that a major difference was that black students had only one black faculty member with whom to discuss particular problems. Thus, black faculty were needed not only to fill an educational deficiency, but as counselors.

The argument that a quota system regarding faculty hiring and student admissions is reverse racism holds no water. Ron pointed out that the racism at Bennington had been preserved by the autonomy of divisions whose way of operating existed as a closed circular procedure. Therefore strong directives would be a way of breaking into this closed system. In general, the search for black students should be goal oriented; procedure orientation would only preserve the status quo.

An example mentioned involved the problems of financial aid and admissions. Here the deadline for application for financial aid might be moved back were it discovered that this would have results.

In exploring possible changes regarding financial aid, it was urged that the committee not endorse a fund for blacks exclusively. This might result in the limiting of the number of black students.

Questions were asked regarding the "independent" student, a student disassociated from his parents or parental support. This led to the general question of equitable distribution of available money. It was hoped that criteria for distribution be reexamined and, where necessary, clarified.

Next ensued a series of concrete suggestions:

- 1) that x number of blacks be admitted as freshmen and transfers; that if such a quota was not achieved the money for covering same would be reserved for future black enrollees.
- 2) (Roberta) that the college be investigated for such things as institutionalized racism by a disinterested investigating group. Ron pointed out that if we were not interested in the possibility of legal coercion the committee might carry out its own investigation and interviews.
- 3) (Kay) that the Columbia "Equal Opportunity Employer", Mrs. Clark, lecture to the group on tactics, as she has done at Harvard.

The attitude of "student services" towards black scholarship students was discussed. Students felt that they have to justify their clothes, if they are good looking, to administrative personnel. Tim D. was specifically mentioned. It was felt that one is forced to justify what have been presented as statements of fact; it is assumed that one would automatically cheat Bemington College out of deserved monies; and the reduction of the student budget is seen as the rule rather than the exception. An example of general incompetence or lack of concern was offered, by way of explanation, in which one student was not informed about a particular scholarship (a scholarship which would have been perfect for her).

Kate suggested that a white student serve on the committee. Everyone present rejected this notion though it was felt that white students might be invited to attend meetings from time to time. It was felt that the white students, at least initially, would have little to offer and that their inclusion as a way of establishing credibility as Kate suggested, was not valid. (Ron mentioned the analogous case where faculty rejected the notion of student participation on committees so that those committees might establish credibility with students. This argument might now be used by black students vis a vis the participation of whites, that black students were as trustworthy as the faculty had claimed to be.)

Plans were made for Roberta and Henry to speak with SEPC and Student Council, as a way of the committee keeping in touch with students.

After some discussion it was decided that the first step would be to send questionnaires to the individual divisions and to admissions, concerning hiring of blacks and black admissions respectively.

Henry indicated our need "to document the whole position in each division." Students would work out questions for the admissions office, Ron and Bill would deal with a divisional questionnaire. Trustees would write up questions for both areas. The questionnaires are to be fact finders, so that certain statements can then be made on the dimensions of the problem.

The responses to the questionnaires would be discussed and compiled on May 28th when the campus committee (faculty and students) will meet. At this time they will decide if they are ready to have the trustee members reappear June 3rd to discuss the results of the questionnaires and to start team interviews in the college community.

The campus group will consist of:

Faculty:	Lionel Novak Bill Dixon Ron Cohen
Administration:	Gail Parker
Students:	Henry Carnes (Chairman) Jimmy Means Philemona Williamson Judy Wilson (when she comes back)