

To : The Community

From : Edward J. Bloustein

Subject : Answers to questionnaire on problems of communication - "Problems in Communication"



1) Although there is a "communication problem, "I feel the deeper problem here as elsewhere on American campuses is a distrust of authority generally and a distrust specifically of administrative, and to a lesser degree, faculty authority. I tried to explain the basis of this distrust in a lecture I recently gave, which was subsequently circulated to the Community.

2) The specific communication problems which exist on this campus concern primarily the relationships of the Student constituency to the Faculty and Administrative constituencies. Faculty and Administration meet regularly at weekly Faculty Educational Policy Committee meetings, which the President chairs and which the Deans attend, monthly Faculty Personnel Committee meetings, chaired by the President, monthly meetings of the full Faculty chaired by the President, and periodic meetings of other Faculty committees attended by the President and other members of the Administration. Frequent contact also takes place between the Dean of Faculty and Divisional Secretaries and other faculty members, between the Dean of Studies and the chairmen of Educational Counselling Committees and between the Director of Student Personnel and faculty counsellors.

Through all of these mechanisms, and others as well -- most of them, it is to be noted, are extra-constitutional -- the President and the other members of the College Administration are kept constantly aware of Faculty policy decisions and have frequent occasion to respond to Faculty inquiries concerning the administrative implementation of those decisions.

It is my judgment that no comparable mechanisms of coordination exist between the Administration and Faculty and competent organs of Student Government. Although many members of the Administration meet individually and on frequent occasions with students and elected student leaders, and although the President and other administrators meet on rare occasions with organs of Student Government, there is no regular process of consultation with these organs of Student Government

I have personally suggested such regular consultation to a member of student leaders, but have come away with the feeling that "Administrative presence" at meetings of organs of Student Government is considered suspect and dangerous. I believe this is a serious mistake. Were students to agree to a process of consultation comparable to that which presently exists between Faculty and Administration many of our "communication problems" would disappear.

3) It arises out of specific issues but is symptomatic of the underlying difficulty I suggest in (1) above.

4) I believe a sense of "national unrest" and a sense of the "generation gap" are, indeed, reflected in our life on campus. In many instances, what happens on campus is a true reflection of the real and substantial problems for which these slogans have come to stand. In many other instances, however, I feel students mistakenly apply stereo-typed, caricature-like thinking to campus

problems, supposing that because a given problem exists elsewhere it must necessarily exist here.

5) Only in part.

6) Yes.

7) Yes. At a minimum, I would suggest the adoption of the faculty proposal in regard to Judicial. An even greater benefit would accrue if Judicial were to include faculty members as full voting participants, "Advisors" tends to imply a paternalistic relationship. Full membership would imply a one-to-one relationship of equality and mutual responsibility. By adding faculty to Judicial, it would become a more credible body because it would be representative of the whole Community rather than only one segment of it.

8) I suspect strongly that division of the community into 3 separate constituencies is at the root of much of the "communication problem." Before undertaking to modify this basic constitutional pattern, however, I believe it would be wise to institute more limited remedies for a period of a year or so. Among these remedies are the informal processes of consultation discussed above in (2), changes in Judicial discussed above in (7), and the appointment of a community council, along the lines suggested in the faculty memorandum of March 21, 1968.

Bennington College
May 22, 1968