

Bennington College
April, 1946

BENNINGTON COLLEGE CONSTITUTION

I. FRAMEWORK OF COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT

- A. The community shall consist of the student body, faculty and staff. Their participation as individuals in the art of education and living together form the substance of community life. The employees of the College are invited to participate in community meetings.
- B. The organization of community life comprises College Administration and Community Government. College Administration is based on the charter and by-laws of the Bennington College Corporation and the common law created by decisions of the Board of Trustees, the President and the faculty. Community Government derives from the existence of the community and from the educational principles of the College; it is based on the Bennington College constitution. College Administration and Community Government are two complementary and interdependent approaches to community organization.
- C. The members of the community assembled in community meetings are the sovereign body. They are empowered to enact and repeal community standards and constitutional provisions, to take part in the formulation of educational policies, to create and abolish committees and to delegate specific powers to them, to elect and recall representatives. The House meetings and Faculty-Staff meetings shall be the basic units for the discussion of community problems.
- D. Responsibility for carrying out the various functions of community government shall be lodged in the Community Council,

a general executive body which supplies the leadership of the community; Central Committee, a judicial body; and the House Chairmen, house administrators.

- E. Recognizing the fact that all members of the community carry special functions and responsibilities, special committees are established to deal with specific areas of concern.

II. THE HOUSE UNIT

- A. The membership of each of the twelve houses consists of all the students living in it and off-campus students assigned to the house.
- B. The members of the houses should attend all house meetings, and concern themselves with the administration of the house and the participation of the house in community life. Faculty and Staff members may participate in house meetings. The discussion in house meetings should deal with any matters of general interest which are referred to the house by members of the community or by community committees. The house may suggest that a topic be taken to a community meeting for consideration.
- C. Each house shall elect a Representative to the Community Council. She is to be elected on the basis of her ability to aid constructively in the formulation of community problems.
1. Each house shall nominate three of its members for this office during the second week of the second semester.
 2. The representative to the Community Council shall be elected from this slate during the third week of the semester.
- D. Each house shall elect a local administrative officer, the House

Chairman. She shall be elected for her ability to administer the affairs of the house and to adjust the problems that arise between its members. Her duties shall include the running of the house and the organization of such routine matters as the morning check-up and library books. In order to carry out these functions efficiently she may delegate specific powers to responsible house members.

1. Each house shall nominate three of its members for this office during the second week of the second semester.
2. The House Chairman shall be elected from this slate during the third week of the semester.

- E. The House Representative and the House Chairman shall cooperate and enlist one another's aid.
- F. In difficult cases involving the standards of Bennington College or the general well-being of the house, the Chairman shall enlist the cooperation of Central Committee. The members of Central Committee shall meet from time to time with the chairmen of all the houses in order to discuss and adjust any general problems which may arise in the administration of the house unit.

III. THE FACULTY-STAFF UNIT

The Faculty-Staff Unit consists of the President of the College, and the members of the Faculty and Staff. This unit shall elect or select faculty or staff members of the Community Council and discuss problems of community government.

IV. CENTRAL COMMITTEE

- A. Central Committee shall perform its function within the framework of the Standards and Rules of Bennington College,

a code of behavior which has been agreed upon by the entire community in the interests of harmonious living and functional effectiveness. The standards, stated in general terms, represent the community's conception of adult and civilized behavior. The rules are specific campus laws, a body of traffic regulations. At the end of the fall semester of each year, the list of rules and standards shall be voted upon by the entire community after preliminary discussion in the houses.

- B. Central Committee deals with two types of cases:
 - 1. The individual who has infringed upon a rule.
 - 2. The individual who has not behaved in accordance with one or more of the standards.
- C. The method of Central Committee shall be to deal quietly with each individual case, taking into account the rights of both the individual and the community. It shall have the power to recommend to the proper faculty committee dismissal in extreme cases; but it shall rely primarily on counsel and persuasion, in the expectation that there is no need for punishment.
- D. The jurisdiction of Central Committee over Bennington College students includes campus, the town of Bennington and other places where students are clearly identified as members of the Bennington College community.
- E. Central Committee shall be composed of three students and one faculty member. Central Committee elects its own chairman and

secretary. It may ask any member of the community to serve in an advisory capacity. It shall work especially closely with the Director of Student Personnel. Two members of the Central Committee shall take office at the beginning of each semester, and each member shall hold office for two semesters.

1. The faculty member and one student member of the Central Committee shall be elected at the beginning of the second semester.
 - a. Each house shall nominate two students of the office during the second week of the second semester. From these nominations the Community Council shall prepare a slate of two or three names.
 - b. Each house shall nominate two faculty members for the office during the second week of the second semester. The Community Council shall then present the names of the four candidates having the highest number of votes to the Faculty-Staff Unit, which shall then reduce the slate to two names.
 - c. The faculty member and one student member of the Central Committee shall be elected during the third week of the second semester.
2. Two student members of the Central Committee shall be elected at the end of the second semester.
 - a. Each house shall nominate three students for the office, three weeks before the end of the semester. From these nominations the Community Council shall prepare a slate of four names.
 - b. Two students shall be elected to Central Committee two weeks before the end of the second semester.
 - c. These two students shall take office at the beginning of the

following semester.

- F. The Records Office shall be responsible for the granting of early leaves and late returns, and shall refer these applications to the Central Committee only when there is some doubt as to the necessity for leaving early or returning late.

V. RECREATION COUNCIL

- A. The Recreation Council shall consist of one committee, composed of twelve students and two faculty or staff members.
- B. In the last week of the fall term, members of the student houses on the East side of campus shall directly elect six new members to the Recreation Council. Likewise, in the last week of the spring term, members of the West side of campus shall directly elect six new members to the Recreation Council. The new committee shall elect a chairman and secretary and shall, with the advice of the President, elect two faculty or staff members to serve on the committee.
- C. The function of the Recreation Council shall be to take the responsibility for all recreational activities of the community.

VI. STUDENT TREASURER

- A. The Community Council shall, in April, appoint, with the approval of the College Comptroller, a Student Treasurer, who shall be a member, ex-officio, of the Recreation Council. The Student Treasurer shall be responsible to the Community Council and to the Comptroller for the administration of the finances of all student committees.
- B. The Student Treasurer shall present an annual financial report to the Community Council. Her books shall be audited at the end of each fiscal year by the Comptroller or such agency as the Comptroller may designate.

VII. THE COMMUNITY CHEST COMMITTEE

- A. The Community Chest Committee shall consist of two students, appointed by the Community Council in conjunction with the outgoing Committee, and of the Student Treasurer, ex-officio. It shall be appointed in April to serve for one year. For the remainder of the spring term, the members of the old committee, ex-officio, shall serve on the new committee.
- B. The Community Council on nomination of the Student Treasurer shall appoint students to act as collectors of funds under her direction, in conjunction with the Community Chest Committee.
- C. The functions of the Committee shall be:
 - 1. To receive and evaluate all appeals made to the community for money or property from local charitable organizations.
 - 2. To receive and evaluate all appeals made to the community for money or property from national war charities.
 - 3. To draw up a budget based on its evaluation of these appeals and its estimate of the probably voluntary contributions from members of the community. The Committee shall submit the budget for approval to the Community Council and, at the Council's discretion, to the community.
 - 4. To manage an Employees' Christmas Gift Fund and/or any other community obligation, and to submit a budget for these activities according to provisions hereinabove stated.
 - 5. To administer, with the approval of the Community Council, any surplus which may accrue.
 - 6. To sanction as it sees fit any campaign or appeal to the community for money or property by any organization. It shall consult the Community Council whenever in doubt about

such sanctions.

VIII. HEALTH COMMITTEE

- A. The Student Health Officer shall act as a liaison between the Health Service and the student body.
- B. In April, at the first meeting of the Community Council, one representative on the council shall be elected student health officer.
- C. She shall deal with misunderstandings which might arise between the student body and the Health Service, and provide the medical staff with a student officer to aid them in Freshman orientation and any emergency which might arise.
- D. She shall meet with the medical staff when necessary, and/or at least once a term.

IX. STUDENT EDUCATIONAL POLICIES COMMITTEE

- A. The Student Educational Policies Committee shall consist of six student members; each member to represent the faculty and students in any way connected with the field which elected her.
- B. The members shall be elected as early in the second term as possible by the Senior Division students in each field, as well as by Sophomores who may identify themselves with whatever field seems most plausible. Nominations will take place in student meetings chaired by the outgoing representative and will include no more than six nominees. The slate for each field will then go to the faculty of the field for consideration and amendment and they will submit the slate with no more than four nominees to the Faculty Educational Policies Committee for approval. This slate will then be posted and Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors shall vote for one nominee out of the group they have nominated.

- C. If a member of the Student Educational Policies Committee resigns during her term of office, the nominee next in succession on the preferential ballot in the last election shall, with the advice and consent of the Faculty Educational Policies Committee, automatically fill the vacancy.
- D. The officers of the Student Educational Policies Committee shall consist of a chairman and a secretary elected by the Committee. At these elections only the new members shall vote.
- E. The function of the Student Educational Policies Committee shall be:
 - 1. To consider problems in connection with the educational policies of the College and to bring them to the attention of the faculty and students.
 - 2. To promote the most efficient work relationships between groups of individual students and faculty members.
 - 3. To be consulted by the faculty and staff when the Committee's opinion as representative of the student body is wanted on matters of educational policy.
 - 4. To canvass student opinion when necessary.
- X. THE GENERAL MEETINGS COMMITTEE
 - A. The General Meetings Committee shall consist of two student members, chosen in September by the Committee from a slate submitted by the Student Educational Policies Committee, faculty members chosen by the President, and one permanent administrator. The Committee will choose its own chairman.
 - B. The General Meetings Committee shall be responsible for the organization and management of all meetings, exhibits and the like, other than regular scheduled academic activities. It

shall consider the needs and interests of the community in the administration of these activities.

XI. THE SILO BOARD

- A. The Silo Board shall fill any vacancies by electing new members to the Board at the last meeting of each semester. The Board shall elect its own officers at the first meeting of the first semester to serve for one year. The Board shall choose two faculty members to serve as advisors.
- B. Its function shall be to issue publications at intervals which the Board shall determine.
- C. The Silo Board shall be responsible to the community as a whole.

XII. THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL AND THE STEERING COMMITTEE

- A. The Community Council shall be the chief executive and policy making body of the community. Its principal functions are to coordinate the various special committees of the community, to deal with community-wide problems and to initiate legislation. Other special functions of the Community Council include:

1. Responsibility for the agenda of house meetings, for insuring that all problems confronting special committees which are of interest to the community be presented to the houses; and that problems of community and nationwide interest be discussed in the houses.
2. Responsibility for insuring that an annual meeting is held, in cooperation with special committees, in all the houses on the standards of the community and the functions of all committees.
3. Responsibility for the calling and the conduct of community meetings.
4. The handling of community elections.
5. Dealing with grievances presented by any member of the community.
6. Responsibility for introducing freshmen to the Bennington College Community, for which purpose

the cooperation of the house officers and the special committees shall be enlisted.

- B. The Community Council shall consist of 15 members: a Representative from each house, two faculty-staff members, and a chairman elected by the entire community. The elections shall be held at the beginning of the spring semester. There shall be no permanent member and no ex-officio member. The Community Council may ask committee members or other members of the community to serve in an advisory capacity.
- C. The Chairman of the Community Council shall be nominated in house primaries and Faculty-Staff primaries during the second week of the second semester; each unit shall nominate two candidates from the entire community. The outgoing Community Council shall draw up a slate of the 4 to 6 candidates receiving the highest vote in the primaries. One of the candidates shall then be elected during the third week of the second semester. In the event that the successful candidate is the Representative of her house, a new Representative shall be elected.
- D. The faculty-staff members of the Community Council shall be nominated by the Faculty-Staff unit. The President shall consult with the nominees and appoint the two who are most willing and able to serve.
- E. In matters of legislation, the procedure is as follows;
The Community Council must discuss the issue and draw up an agenda for house meetings at which full discussion shall be encouraged. Any issue which concerns the faculty and/or staff shall be discussed in a meeting of the Faculty-Staff Unit before the final community meeting. The final vote shall take place in community meeting; the community vote is binding.

The Community Council must set the legislative procedure in motion upon the receipt of a petition signed by ten percent of the community calling for the revoking and/or enacting of standards, rules or constitutional provisions. Any member of the Community may petition to Community Council to undertake proceedings for the enactment or revoking of legislation.

- F. The Community Council shall be aided by the Steering Committee, Neither an executive nor a law-making body, the Steering Committee shall act as an advisor to the Community Council. Its purpose is to ensure the maximum of understanding and participation by the community in its government. The Steering Committee shall stimulate, evaluate and coordinate the activities of the various committees. It shall propose, for the discussion and treatment, various aspects of community business, in an attempt to insure both a more active government and a more active community.
- G. The Steering Committee shall be composed of the Chairman of the Community Council, and a faculty or staff members, and two students who are appointed by the Community Council.
1. During the second week of the second semester the Faculty-Staff Unit shall nominate three of its members to the Steering Committee. The new Community Council at its first meeting shall elect one of these candidates to the Steering Committee.
 2. The new Community Council at its first meeting shall elect two student members to the Steering Committee.
- H. Election Sub-Committees
- The election sub-committees conduct the general elections in the

community; i.e., see that all nominations are made, approved by the Records Office, and posted before elections; and supervise the printing and counting of ballots. They may appoint poll watchers and ballot counters if needed.

1. Each election sub-committee consists of four people.
2. The Community Council will appoint from its own members one election sub-committee three weeks before the elections in July, and a second election sub-committee three weeks before the end of the first semester to conduct the elections in the following April.

XIII. RECALL OF STUDENT OFFICERS

- A. Individual committees must define what an officer can be impeached for. This entire question will be determined by the procedure of recall, which shall be as follows:
- B. A petition shall be signed by 10% or not less than 10 of the group which elected the officer, and/or a petition shall be signed by 2/3 of the committee on which she serves.
- C. This petition (or those petitions) shall be presented to the Steering Committee, which shall make a full investigation and a final recommendation to the Community Council to call for a vote of confidence. At any time during these proceedings the officer in question may resign; otherwise she must wait until a vote of confidence is authorized by the Community Council.
- D. By a simple majority vote of the group which elected her, a student officer may be removed from her position.

XIV. AMENDMENT OF THE BY-LAWS

Any section of these by-laws for the organization of the College community can be amended by a majority vote at the Community Meeting, provided the proposed change is posted at least one week in advance of the Community Meeting.

THE COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT

