

April 7, 1975

An Open Letter to the F.E.P.C.

FROM: Dance, Drama and Black Music

We understand that once again the F.E.P.C. has voted, without consulting the concerned divisions, to restructure the F.E.P.C. as follows: Three representatives from the four Performing Arts Divisions and Visual Arts, three from Social Science, Science and Literature, and two to be elected from the faculty at large.

Last spring the Dance and Drama Divisions sent a letter regarding Divisional composition of the F.E.P.C. to the F.E.P.C. It was our feeling then as now that information about the internal organization and educational structure of the Performing Arts Divisions, particularly Dance, Drama and Black Music, was lacking. Decisions were being made by the F.E.P.C. which were unknowingly damaging our educational and artistic functioning. We feel this could be corrected by changing current categories of representation from one individual who represents the four Performing Arts Divisions, i.e. Drama, Dance, Black Music and Music, to a system which would be more workable and informative. We suggest one individual from Black Music, one from Music, and one to represent both Dance and Drama.

The reason we propose this is that the current decision to eliminate the Dance and Drama costumer and the proposal to eliminate the teaching function of Associates and not provide Dance, Drama and Black Music with additional faculty is hurting these Divisions seriously. It means that subjects we consider essential in our fields can no longer be taught. In Dance and Drama the decision affects costume design and construction, lighting design and practice, and stagecraft and construction. In Black Music important portions of the curriculum will be similarly affected. The F.E.P.C. is performing a fatal operation on our curricula. This has been stated before, but we will do so again: In Dance and Drama the individuals who are responsible for these previously mentioned areas not only teach, but also supervise all aspects of practical activities relating to these subjects. In time, effort, hours of contact with students, preparation, hours spent on the job, these positions compare to full faculty positions. Financial equality and regularization of salaries are necessary for these teachers in order to insure quality education at Bennington College.

The new building was conceived as an educational space. This includes not only studios, but the new theatres as well. What about the effect of these decisions on productions? Participation in all aspects of production is part of the educational experience our students must have. What goes on before the curtain rises and backstage is an essential part of the study and practice of theatrical art. All Divisions have requirements - we have ours. In no way will our students' needs be met by having technical/design work done for them by hiring "experts" to come in at the appropriate moment. There is no educational value in a Performing Arts program in a liberal arts college that does not provide creative work, performance, practice, theoretical and technical work for students. There is no joy for faculty artists working with mutilated curricula.

We do not suggest that more appropriate representation of the Performing Arts on the F.E.P.C. would magically solve all problems. We do feel some situations might have been avoided and better educational alternatives found.