

To: Board of Trustees of Bennington College

October 24, 1955

From: Frederick Burkhardt, President

Subject: Special Report on the Faculty

Number of full-time faculty members: 46 Part-time: 3

Distribution of faculty by fields:	Social Science	13
	Literature and Languages	11
	Music	7
	Visual Arts	7
	Natural Science and Mathematics	5
	Drama	3
	Dance	3

Length of service: Average - $9\frac{1}{2}$ years

<u>Years of service</u>	<u>Number of Faculty Members</u>
Over 20	6
15 - 20	3
10 - 15	10
5 - 10	21
Under 5	9

Age: Average - 44; Median - 44

Married - 38; Single - 11

Male - 40; Female - 9

In the academic fields, 76% of the faculty members have advanced degrees, and 45% have the Ph.D.

The figures given above show a number of interesting facts about the Bennington faculty. They show that the faculty is young, highly qualified in training, relatively stable, predominately male and predominately married. What the figures do not show is that the faculty is composed of excellent teachers, who are productive, hard-working, loyal, and poorly paid. It is to these facts that the remainder of this report will address itself, because they are important facts which need discussion.

Teaching ability

At most colleges the President can evaluate the teaching ability of the faculty only as a result of hearsay evidence, general reputation, enrollment figures, and his own impressions. This may be one reason why teaching effectiveness is so often ranked below research, publication and length of service when decisions are made about promotion. At Bennington teaching is not only considered to be of prime importance, but there are effective procedures for evaluating teaching ability. As a result, faculty members who receive reappointments are known to be good teachers.

The appointment system at Bennington offers no permanent tenure to any faculty member. The longest contract is for five years, given only after a faculty member has been re-appointed for one- and three-year terms. Before reappointment the faculty member is evaluated (as a teacher) on the basis of the following evidence:

1. Alumnae ratings of his teaching ability, on two occasions-- six months and two years after the year of graduation.
2. Reports prepared and discussed with the faculty member and the President by the Student Educational Policies Committee, which has an elected representative in each class.
3. Discussion by the President and the Faculty Educational Policies Committee, which consists of six faculty members elected by preferential ballot by the faculty as a whole.

Almost always the evidence from these separate sources is consistent. Apart from leading to many constructive suggestions, this system provides dependable criteria for reappointment, and its checks and balances protect the faculty member from arbitrary judgments of colleagues, students, and administration alike.

Though it is not in itself conclusive, it is nevertheless a highly impressive fact that in the alumnae ratings over a recent five-year period from 49% to 68% of the faculty members received a majority of ratings in the top category, which describes them as "Excellent teachers, whom the College should make every effort to keep." Not a single faculty member was rated by a majority of the alumnae reporting as "Unsatisfactory."

Productivity

The emphasis on good teaching does not mean that scholarship and productivity are necessarily subordinated. The evidence shows that good training and productivity are very closely related to good teaching. A good scholar may be a poor teacher, but an excellent teacher is likely to be a good scholar, a creative practitioner in his field, and well-trained in it. The evidence for this is ample at Bennington.

1. A recent visiting committee from other colleges, whose function it was to evaluate Bennington's educational standards, said in its report: "One of the most impressive sights we saw at Bennington is the bookcase in the librarian's office which contains the publications of the Bennington faculty, a really notable collection both in quantity and quality, especially when one takes into account the extreme youth of the college."

2. Of the 21 members of the faculty in academic or "book-learning" fields (excluding sciences and languages), 10 have published at least one book, and some (like Kenneth Burke, George Soule, Max Salvadori, and Wallace Fowlie) have published extensively. At least six others

have published articles or other writings in their fields, and at least four more are writing books or doing research for eventual publication. In Music, Dance, and the Visual Arts every member of the faculty is a creative performer who is accustomed to submitting his work--concerts, paintings, sculpture, etc., to the judgment of his peers. The faculty in Drama is equally productive, though their medium restricts them for the most part to the Bennington campus and local community. And, all four of the natural scientists are engaged in independent research projects. This productive record is outstanding. Considering the youth of the faculty members, the achievement is remarkable.

The Faculty Work-Load

The Bennington system calls for an exceptionally high faculty-student ratio: there is one teacher for every 6.5 students. To many a teacher in this country this must seem ideal. It is, but not because it makes for an easy life with plenty of time for one's own work. When College is in session the faculty spends an enormous proportion of its time in direct contact with the students. In the arts, teaching and counseling is practically full time, four or five days a week. In the academic fields, where it is easier to count scheduled hours, the instructors teach two or three courses and have an average of eight counselees. The latter, in the case of advanced students, are usually tutorials, which amount to separate and individual courses. The Bennington teaching method, which replaces grades with reports and extensive critical evaluation and rejects the mechanical

short-cuts which are essential to mass education, takes a great deal of time in teaching, preparation, and evaluation. An analysis of faculty load recently made indicated that thirty-one hours each week is the average time spent by full-time faculty members in teaching, counseling, seminars, and committee responsibilities. No unit of measurement exists for estimating the energy required for teaching at Bennington, but every aspect of the system makes for greater strain and pressure than exists under the conventional 50-minute lecture system and the ten class hours a week which is the usual teaching load in fields like literature and social science at most American universities.

Loyalty

The major evidence of the loyalty of the Bennington faculty is shown in the next section of this memorandum, devoted to their salaries. All of the faculty members at Bennington, except the few who have independent means, have been under serious financial pressure. Most of them have families to support and children to educate and need money for travel and research connected with their professions, but, since 1947, there have been only five instances in which faculty members left Bennington primarily for financial advantage. Even in these cases, the attractiveness of an appointment to a large university or urgent requests that they take positions in government contributed to the decision.

There are several other indirect evidences of the faculty's dedication and devotion to Bennington, apart from the fact that they have stayed though their real income has decreased. Faculty members

have told me that these are some of the things that keep them at Bennington:

The teaching conditions and methods. Since they are all interested in teaching, they like a College which places major emphasis on this aspect. They find the students rewarding, appreciate the freedom they have in working up their own courses and techniques, and consider the policy of the College on academic freedom excellent. One faculty member, who has had extensive university teaching experience, recently wrote to me, "I have not found a teaching context which compares with the opportunities here." I think that many of his colleagues agree with him.

Faculty members enjoy living at the College. The intellectual interchange with colleagues, the pleasant social life, and the cultural advantages which the College itself offers are satisfying.

The Non-Resident Term, which gives the faculty members ten weeks' free time during the winter, is an advantage. This gives them an excellent opportunity to write, engage in research, give concerts, and otherwise pursue their professional careers.

The sabbatical system of the College is exceptionally good. It provides one semester's leave with pay every five years.

Faculty Salary Situation

The range of salaries at Bennington is now \$3,800 to \$6,800. The average salary is \$4,970 and the median salary is \$4,950. The distribution of salaries for full-time faculty members is as follows:

<u>Salary</u>	<u>No. of faculty members receiving this salary</u>
\$6,800	1
6,500	1
6,300	3
6,000	1
5,900	1
5,750	1
5,700	1
5,500	3
5,300	1
5,250	1
5,200	1
5,100	1
5,000	7
4,900	1
4,800	3
4,750	2
4,700	3
4,600	1
4,500	6
4,450	1
4,300	1
4,200	1
4,000	3
3,800	1

The average salary in 1940 was \$3,742, and the increase is therefore 33%, but this increase has far from kept pace with the rise in the cost of living. The real income of the average Bennington faculty member has declined 30% since 1940. Bennington salaries in 1940 compared very favorably with those in other colleges and universities, they are now comparatively less good.

The salary increases of faculty members who are now at Bennington have averaged \$151 per annum over the last ten years, and this has been possible only because of strictest economies in the operation of the plant.

The comparative percentages of the total budget spent for instructional salaries and for operation and maintenance of plant

since the year 1947-48 are of interest:

	<u>1947-8</u>	<u>1948-9</u>	<u>1949-50</u>	<u>1950-1</u>	<u>1951-2</u>	<u>1952-3</u>	<u>1953-4</u>	<u>1954-5</u>
Instructional Salaries	44%	47%	49%	48%	48%	49%	49%	50%
Operation and Maintenance of Plant	21%	18%	16%	15%	15%	14%	14%	15%

In summary and conclusion it may be said that, despite the budgetary difficulties of the post-war years, the College has been successful in maintaining the high quality of its teaching staff. This was made possible by the practice of stringent economy in our operation and, perhaps most of all, by the devotion of the faculty to the College during a period when it was impossible for us to raise salaries as much as they should have been raised. Now that the College has overcome the problems of survival and solvency during an inflationary period, I am gratified that the first order of priority set by the Board of Trustees for the development of the College has been to raise the Bennington faculty salary scale.