



# BENNINGTON COLLEGE

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we round the corner into the new academic year at Bennington, we carry the momentum of all that our community accomplished over the past year. The feats of our students, faculty, and staff—enlivened by Bennington's pioneering spirit—astonish year after year, as you'll see for yourself below.

Bennington's self-directed, work-integrated approach to learning remains firmly ahead of the curve.

A three-year **\$800,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation** in support of our forward-thinking pedagogy has enabled the launch of the First-Year Forum. This past year, we piloted First-Year Forum with a third of the entering class to help first-year students reflect on their education, prepare them for inquiry-based learning, and encourage the development of the whole student within the broader campus community. The entire entering class in Fall 2018 will participate in the coming academic year.

The [Lumina Foundation](#) identified Bennington as a leader in work-integrated learning, providing a grant to convene with other colleges concerned about equity in work opportunities for students. The College is in the process of implementing a number of improvements that will **expand student access to paid on- and off-campus employment**, provide greater opportunities in STEM fields, and continue to nurture the inquiry and reflection that link together various work-learning experiences.

The *New York Times* launched a new section on learning this past spring that highlighted Bennington. [The story](#) featured **a pop-up course we offered on gun violence and gun laws, *After Parkland***. The College established pop-ups in 2015 to encourage faculty to bring current events into the classroom in real time, where teachers can work through the questions, debates, and new developments with students, modeling a process that helps them learn strategies to take on urgent, complex, and contested issues with rigor—skills our graduates will draw on as they enter the world.

### "We confidently recommend them"

The 149 members of the class of 2018 hailed from far and wide. In the United States, graduates represented 28 states. Across the world, Bennington's reputation continues to grow, with international students from more than 55 countries—including Nepal, Pakistan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Vietnam—comprising 25% of this year's class.

The class of 2018 made a tremendous impact during their time with us:

- Influencing art and culture in a new [Off-Broadway Fellowship program](#) (in partnership with the [Lucille Lortel Foundation](#));
- Strengthening an expanded [Museum Fellows Term](#) (in partnership with the [Helen Frankenthaler Foundation](#));
- Developing [a women's empowerment center](#) in Pakistan through the [Davis Projects for Peace](#); and
- Sharing their work with the greater Bennington region through [community cookbooks](#) and [pop-up science museums](#).

[Read about their accomplishments](#), and watch the commencement speeches by [Lauren Omokheoa '18](#), guest speaker [Liz Lerman](#), and faculty member [Stephen Shapiro](#).

Our 2018 graduates explored broadly, with 94% of students taking at least one course in Society, Culture, and Thought, 91% taking a course in Visual Arts, 79% taking a course in Public Action, 74% taking a course in Music, 67% taking a course in Science & Mathematics, and 61% taking a course in Dance.

And, throughout each course in every discipline, students develop and apply fundamental [capacities](#), learning to inquire, research, create, engage, and communicate—cross-cutting skills that are as critical to success in the workforce as they are to personal pursuits.

### The Year in Review: Speed Round

**The Center for the Advancement of Public Action** (CAPA) had a full year, responding to crises and opportunities both close to home and across the globe: a convening addressing the looming **water crisis** in the Kabul River Basin led to a [breakthrough](#) in the establishment of the Transboundary Water In-cooperation Network; the Consortium on Forced Migration, Displacement, and Education [met with](#) partners from Bard, Vassar, and Sarah Lawrence Colleges; and this spring's Incarceration in America [Conference](#) focused on **immigration detention reform**.

Closer to home, **students are providing support to local schools**: working with Quantum Leap to help students at risk of dropping out of high school; designing and implementing after-school workshops for a local elementary school; assisting the local middle school in implementing VT Act 77, which requires every middle schooler to create a Personal Learning Plan; and teaching Chinese, French, Japanese, and Spanish to elementary-aged students in Bennington and North Bennington.

Over the past year, new Director of the **Bennington Writing Seminars** Mark Wunderlich has launched initiatives to engage students and alumni and expand the reach of the program. These developments include establishing a [Residential Teaching Fellow program](#); announcing a [fully funded scholarship for poetry candidates](#) in memory of Donald Hall; creating new programs for alumni, including a generative workshop in Ekphrastic Writing with poet and faculty member Michael Dumanis; and developing a Post-MFA term for writers with book-length projects. Wunderlich formed the Bennington Writing Seminars Alumni Council and hosted MFA alumni engagement events in Los Angeles, Tampa, and New York City, each of which featured alumni reading from their work. Wunderlich is planning to formalize further literary opportunities that will add to the post-graduate experience and continue to provide ways for the MFA community to reconnect at Bennington.

A year ago, Anne Thompson came to Bennington as the inaugural curator of the **Usdan Gallery** with the charge to create a hub of expansive, interdisciplinary programming. Usdan initiatives this year laid groundwork for a programmatic mission to present dynamic exhibitions of contemporary artists and concepts, extend Usdan activities beyond gallery walls into the campus and regional landscape, and showcase new perspectives on the College history and its collections. Among the first exhibitions was a [campus-wide installment](#) by Alexandra Bell, whose narrative-challenging work was [featured in](#) *The New York Times*. [Read more](#) about Bell's exhibition and other Usdan highlights from the past year.

Looking forward, in 2018-19 the gallery will present **a series of three exhibitions** featuring artists whose expanded practices in traditional mediums investigate the politics of identity, in particular race and gender, and environment. [Torkwase Dyson](#) (September-December 2018); [Keiko Narahashi](#) (February-April 2018); and [Marie Lorenz](#) (April-May 2018). We hope you will come to campus and experience these shows.

**The Robert Frost Stone House Museum** was successfully re-imagined, re-curated, and re-opened by a team of Bennington staff and faculty, including Megan Mayhew Bergman, Paige Bartels, students Blair Blumberg '18, Sophie Parker-Goos '18, Yulia Andreeva-Freimon '18, and the inaugural Frost Fellow, Clark Glennon '18. The Stone House offers an educational opportunity for students to do hands-on work across disciplines. The College is also using it to host events for the local community—including concerts, lectures, and classes. It connects to the College's broader literary legacy and is creating space to take a fresh look at a storied poet—as the [LA Times wrote](#). The [museum](#) is open to the public (Wednesdays through Sundays 11:00 am to 5:00 pm until October) and our reopening garnered [national attention](#). [Stay tuned](#) for news on future programming at the Frost House, including art shows, outdoor concerts, yoga, and readings.

### A Look Ahead

Soon we will be welcoming the extraordinarily bright, creative, and diverse Bennington Class of 2022. The College received a record 1,470 applicants and, as of August 24, we have 203 first-year students. This incoming class includes students from 29 states and 30 countries, and, of these students:

- 17% are from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds;
- 19% are the first in their family to attend college;
- 24% hold international citizenship; and
- 26% are Pell grant eligible.

We are also very excited to welcome:

- [Ten new faculty](#) members in wide range of subject areas;
- [Tony Cabasco](#), Vice President for Enrollment; and
- [Delia Saenz](#), Vice President for Institutional Inclusion, Equity, and Leadership Development.

New students, faculty, and staff will arrive to a campus on which the [Commons Renovation](#) project will have surpassed the 50% completion milestone. As the work progresses, it is becoming increasingly evident that what we are creating will not only be a transformative facility for Bennington in terms of fulfilling the functional needs of the institution, but a beautiful, varied, and inspiring collection of spaces that reflect the character and vitality of Bennington College as a place. (For a deeper dive into the space—as it was and as it will be—see the latest issue of [Bennington Magazine](#).)

All of the work described above has been generously supported by Bennington's alumni, students, families, faculty, staff, and friends. Our community of over 2,100 donors made gifts totaling \$14 million in fiscal year 2018. These investments have enabled myriad opportunities, from providing scholarship support for first-generation college students to Field Work Term grants (as well as providing job opportunities and mentorship), to establishing endowed funds in support of new faculty recruitment, public action, and Poetry at Bennington. All of these meaningful gifts provide Bennington with the flexibility to invest in our core programming, focusing on our students, our faculty, and our campus.

I am grateful for and inspired by the Bennington community's willingness to step forward and give so generously. We have had consecutive near-record years of philanthropic support, for which I cannot thank our alumni, parents, and friends enough. This support allows us to continue to bring forward important new initiatives, which you'll be hearing more about during the coming year. Momentum is with Bennington, and I am excited to share our progress with all of you.

Thank you for all that you do for Bennington. I hope to see you in Vermont or on the road this year.

Mariko Silver