

Community Meeting

A community meeting was held in the theatre at 7:30 on Wednesday, April 11. Gretchen Hutchins presided.

The following statement in favor of the proposed one o'clock rule was read:

In view of the recent discussion it seems logical to state first of all, that a rule is not against the educational policies of the Bennington College community.

It was originally planned that the community should make rules as the need for them was felt. Therefore their formation is in no sense a failure but rather a growth toward the better understanding of the individual's relationship to society. Already we have rules which were made for the convenience of the whole.

As far as standards are concerned, we consider them as general statements of conduct, and within them the rules stand as corollaries to them, not separate from them.

Apparently the need has been felt for some rule to control men visiting the campus. In this respect the following was suggested: That all men leave the campus by 1:00 a.m. and that none come on after that time. The reasons for this rule seem to be:

1. to safe-guard the reputation of the community at large.
2. to make more efficient use of the community's employees, the policeman and the watchman, by defining the extent of their power.
3. to lessen the disturbance to the community.

The main objection to this rule seems to be that the educational value resulting from personal choice will be lost. This would be true if the President or administration imposed rules upon us. But when the community makes a rule it is expressing a choice, and each individual is deciding from a disinterested point of view what is the wisest course of action for the good of the whole. Another solution which has been suggested is to leave the council free to interpret the Standards at its own discretion. Although the council would always deal with each situation individually and from a new and objective point of view, still it would be known what form of conduct would meet with their disapproval, thus although there is an illusion of free choice, any choice which does not meet with the approval of the council, will have the same result as infraction of a rule.

We wish to make it quite clear that if we are advocating a rule at the present time, when it seems to be a logical and practical solution of our difficulties, we would equally advocate its repeal if we should deem it unnecessary in the future. Of course we intend to strive toward establishing a better understanding of what we mean by "personal responsibility" and are planning definite steps in that direction.

There will never be the imposition of rules on one class by another, as we plan each year to have the community discuss all the decisions previously made.

The following report was made in protest:

In viewing the problem which culminated last week we understand that it demands our fullest attention and cooperation. A solution

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must be made, but without hampering the development of our individual responsibility. We therefore make the following statements:

1. The college aims to prepare us for the outside world. This involves training our responsibility not only towards our work but also towards our social life. We decidedly feel that the development of the latter aspect will not be encouraged, but merely suspended, by the introduction of this rule.

2. It is claimed that if this rule is found unnecessary we will abandon it; but in order to prove a rule superfluous we have to assert our sense of responsibility. How can we do this without the opportunity of testing and developing this responsibility?

3. If this rule is made in consideration of public opinion it certainly won't be effective. In the first place our worst reputation comes from the behavior of girls off campus, in Williamstown and those few places which are open late at night. The public-opinion that cares about rules will think one o'clock very late anyway. If we make this rule for outside opinion it is inconsistent not to make others that would at least be more effective. This is not the right approach to public opinion! It is too small an aspect to consider, for the college reputation is a whole problem in itself and it is superficial to take so small a point.

4. We want our standards a vital thing rather than a mere form as when read in the beginning of the year. They should be stressed as a personal responsibility not only through group meetings but through personal contact and discussion.

5. We believe that the difference between a rule and a standard lies in the fact that the violation of a rule cannot be dealt with in the same individual manner as that of a standard. It is only fair that if the rule is uniform there must be a uniform punishment. While a standard has a flexibility which can deal with individual cases.

(a) As an example we give this case: A girl is entertaining a guest who is in Bennington for a very short time. She has no car with which to leave the college, and converses in the living room until a late hour, disturbing no one. Under a standard this could be accepted as civilized behavior; but under a rule the council could sympathize, accept the explanation etc. but the fact still remained: she had broken the rule, she was anti-social.

The following represent our constructive angle. a, c, and d are accepted under present regulations, while we offer b as a footing for the policeman and nightwatchman.

a. We take for granted that the ten o'clock rule pertains to the guests as well as ourselves, enforcement of which should eliminate many of our "inconveniences".

b. Men after leaving girls must leave the campus at once. The policeman should have complete authority to enforce this.

c. Men should not be allowed on the campus after eleven o'clock unless a girl tells the policeman that she expects a guest and gives him her name and that of the expected guest.

d. The girls themselves should undertake absolute responsibility.

Discussion followed. Violations of the rule would be dealt with individually as violations of standards are. Some people thought that a rule should have a definite punishment to be the same for all cases. This rule is a regulation for the boys, who are not

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concerned with our standards, rather than for the girls. It is for the convenience of the community and is a police regulation to get boys off the campus. Our present Standards and Rules were read. The Standards are largely a matter of individual responsibility plus responsibility to the community. The rules give specific machinery. Anyone who violates rules would be violating standards. We made four rules last year but how did we know whether those were all we needed? The only way to find out if it is a good rule is to try it. The difficulties that gave rise to this rule are very serious and the rule may have practical value in dealing with the situation and would not interfere with free conduct.

Those not in favor of the rule felt that the difficulty has been that the nightwatchman's duties have not been defined. If they were made clear he would be able to get rid of undesirable boys. However it might be difficult for the nightwatchman to distinguish between objectionable and unobjectionable boys. It seems too bad to put a rule on the whole community that is only needed for the minority.

It was suggested that the proposed rule be changed so as to allow the nightwatchman and policeman to get rid of men who are not accompanied by girls.

It was also suggested that no man be allowed on the campus after nine at night unless he has a definite appointment.

It was thought that some of the suggestions made as alternatives to the proposed rule would put a great deal of responsibility on the nightwatchman and policeman.

It was moved and seconded that discussion and decision of this rule be postponed, Carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Cornelia Pierce
Secretary