

To Provoke a Little Thought for Tonight

Bennington today has lost its vision. There is no longer a proud sense of uniqueness, a crusading feeling that it is offering an unusual and exciting concept of education to the world. The administration seems to have become primarily concerned with protecting itself, and, equally at fault, the student body has become apathetic, uninterested, and overly introspective.

We seem to have lost our concept of the thing that makes Bennington so unique, and potentially exciting -- its concept of education. Education here is supposed to be a process whereby one "learns by doing." The emphasis on the use of original sources as opposed to tests, on writing in the lit dept., choreography in the dance dept., composing in music, directing in drama, as well as the whole idea of a work term are reflections of this. By exposure, by a chance to open every avenue of experience, to confront and deal with the issue by having a chance to learn life by living it, Bennington tries to realize its ideal of a realistic education, one that has exposed you to much, yet with the necessary depth.

Thus the theory recognizes that "the whole is the sum of its parts," and on this basis tries to offer as many of these opportunities as possible. Unlike most schools, it offers us a community government that really allows us to participate in governing and to learn from it. It gives us NRT to have contact with the world we live in, and to learn from it. It gives us the opportunity to take responsibility--both in our personal and academic lives--and to learn from it. And it offers resources and encouragement for creativity in many fields.

And it could offer an atmosphere where personal growth and understanding, a real sense of one's individuality, enthusiasm for learning, intellectual stimulation, a chance for contact with other worlds, and involvement, both in our own community and the rest of the world, would give its students strong, exciting educations-- reason for a sense of vision.

This is not however, what Bennington is. The basic structure still exists, under several layers of hypocrisy, self-deception, ignorance, apathy, laziness, inconsiderateness and general selfishness. It is however, rapidly being under-mined on all fronts. The student body is in large part responsible for this. This is not to say that the recent moves by the administration should be condoned. We cannot, however, criticize the administration until we have taken a long overdue look at ourselves and what relation we bear to what has happened to Bennington.

I think that perhaps the key to what has happened here lies in a general trend away from viewing the college in terms of a community. Students here seem to think of it rather in terms of a place where, with certain absolutely minimal responsibilities (and these mostly academic) they can have maximum liberty, and specifically maximum freedom from interference by the rest of the (adult) world. To them college is simply here to protect those "rights " at whatever cost, give us an education, and LEAVE US ALONE.

The results have been twofold: a growing sense of alienation from the college, and, on the basis of many subsequent actions on the part of students, a feeling on the part of the administration that perhaps what the students really want, and more important, need, is some guidance and structure on the school's part. We have seen some of the results of this, and, I suspect will see more in the future, unless we move to counteract this attitude.

OVER-----

Obviously, I am making a generalization. It is difficult to discuss a general trend any other way. I am aware that there are people to whom this Galley in no way applies, and I don't intend to insult any one. My plea is this: if Bennington means anything to you, if its concepts excite you, if you came here for the specific kind of education Bennington can offer, DON'T DECIDE THIS DOESN'T APPLY TO YOU AND THROW IT AWAY. It applies to each and every one of us: we are all responsible. If this college is, for you, anything more than just a place to exist for four years, or if you want it to be something more than that; then be willing, just once, to be honest. Look at the college — is it fulfilling its goals (does it even know them any more?), is it the school you came here for? Look at yourself — are you taking your part of the responsibility that this school asks? Or are you hiding, are you using the school only as a shield from responsibility and commitment? Bennington is not a womb, nor are womb and education in any way synonymous. If you want to leave Bennington equipped in any way to handle the world, and strong enough to defy it when necessary, then you cannot use Bennington solely as a shield, a place to hide, or a place where your inertia, apathy and self-centeredness are protected from scrutiny and criticism.

For those who would argue with my estimation of the situation at Bennington, I offer a few points in defense:

1) As regards our irresponsibility and inconsiderateness; consider the pet issue. Surely that was, more than anything else, a fine example of our unwillingness to act out of common courtesy for one another, let alone accept responsibility for what we do.

2) As regards our apathy — look at the number of student government posts held by default. Better yet, count the average number of votes returned in an election. And the fact that, until students began to feel that their own rights were being infringed upon, there was no real move to look at the school and re-examine its goals and concepts. Until it begins to interfere with our private lives, we don't seem to care what becomes of Bennington.

3) And what about our attitude towards the rules today? There seems to be a growing trend toward ignoring them. Perhaps this is because we no longer feel they are our rules, but rather things inflicted upon us by the administration. Which, if not true now, is certainly a growing possibility. The question is, why do they feel the need for this?

I do not claim, however, that this need for self-examination applies to the student body alone; the whole school needs it. It is time for a re-evaluation of the curriculum, time for a re-evaluation of EPC, of the duties and effectiveness of the Student Personnel Office, of whether or not the administration is willing to support the concept and run the risk of a free, educational Bennington, time for a study of the whole student-faculty-administration relationship. The time is completely appropriate — we must do this now. The issues are being brought out into the open. The Constitution is up for revision. If it means anything to you, talk about this, think about it, (and be honest with yourself,) and then do something. The vision can be regained: THE CHANCE MAY NOT COME AGAIN