
THE COLLEGE WEEK

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COLLEGE FACTS

An Editorial by
President Leigh

Each spring near the time of faculty decisions about promotion one hears on the campus dire rumors about large numbers of students who are not returning to College, decline in numbers and quality of applicants, reduction in scholarships available, excellent faculty members leaving because salaries are low at Bennington, or even forebodings of financial catastrophe. The origins of these rumors in an apprehensive sophomore, an unsure freshman, a junior planning marriage, or a faculty member leaving for another position, are obvious enough. Passing through student house corridors and across dining tables the original factual statements lose their exactness and come to have no established relation at all to quantitative evidence. They are of the order of rocking chair gossip among housewives in small villages where drab lives need drama and excitement. They are evidence not at all of what is actually happening at the College, but rather of the College's failure as yet to have its students, and even some of its faculty members, learn to apply naturally and easily the obvious mental discipline of the social science to the daily life of the College community. For it is the A B C of social science or any logical thinking to be cautious about generalizing from specific facts and to judge any set of current facts in relation to the facts of previous years.

If, for instance, one happened to encounter in one's first trip to the College Store three red-headed girls among the first five Bennington freshmen, it would be only too easy to say that this year's class is full of red-headed girls. Trained thinking - and that is one main purpose of having a college - would delay judgment until one could count the red heads in the whole freshman group. Suppose it proves to be eight? What of that? Obviously, one must know the red-head average for previous freshman classes if one is still concerned with determining the average proportion, and one must set Bennington average red-head percentages in the background of the general American population of young females. That is the way those responsible for operating a College must proceed, rather than to indulge in the irresponsible exercise of fantasy regarding dramatic change and impending catastrophe.

Every fall, before the October Trustee meeting, the President's office issues some very modest, mimeographed annual reports prepared by the heads of the various administrative units. I don't know who reads them. I do. Most of the Trustees do. I think the administrative officers do; and probably a few of the faculty and no students do. They report the reliable, quantitative evidence regarding the current operations of the College set against the background of our past operations. They contain, where it is possible to publish the information, a comparison of Bennington experience with that of other colleges. Most of

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these comparisons with other institutions can't be published, however, because the facts are gathered by a confidential exchange of information between college presidents and financial officers who trust each other to keep the information from general publication. These comparisons are the basis for such general statements as we are able to make, without naming institutions, in our annual reports.

When one gets this available, reliable evidence on the subject matter of spring rumors it is almost always very undramatic. It reveals either a surprising uniformity from year to year as in the case of age at entrance, preference for majors, numbers returning and leaving; or slow, steady - not sharp - trends, such as the geographical trend toward fewer students per school from more schools. They cannot excite anyone. They do reassure one. On the theory that in these days we all need reassurance more than excitement, I am stating below the main conclusions from the evidence now available regarding admissions, persistence and distribution of our students. As the total evidence is not at hand until College opens in September some of the figures for this year are incomplete and approximate. In many cases I shall quote round numbers rather than exact figures.

Student Body Size and Change. We started in 1932 with a one-class College of 85 and added a class a year until we had a four-class College of 254 growing to its present bursting maximum (including non-resident students) of 275. With entering classes ranging between 90 and 110, we have graduated about 50 to 55 each year (51 graduated last June), and another 45 to 50 leave for all kinds of reasons. This means, roughly, that we can expect to admit about 100 new students each year to take the place of 55 who graduate and 45 who do not return. The average size of our nine entering classes has been 96. The estimated size of our tenth, entering this coming September, is 100.

Those Who Do Not Return. The exact average number not returning each fall from all classes for all reasons is 44. As of the middle of August, when I write this, 40 are not returning this fall. Past experience would indicate that this number will probably rise to the average of past years when noses are counted in September.

We have a pretty clear statistical picture of why the 45 leave. Exactly 47%, or about half of them leave because they fail academically or are positively and definitely discouraged by the faculty from continuing their academic work. This includes the four students in the nine years of the College who have been given dishonorable dismissal for persistent violation of community standards. The remainder of the average 45 who do not stay to graduate can be divided into five groups about equal in size - each about 10% of the whole non-returning group: (1) marriage; (2) transfer for study (usually specialized) elsewhere; (3) illness or death; (4) financial difficulty; (5) unknown or lack of interest including family requirements for travel, etc. It is still too early to make an exact distribution under these categories for those who will not return this fall, but a glance at the reasons now available indicates that the 50-50 division between leaving for lack of academic success and for other reasons is being almost exactly maintained, and that those leaving voluntarily distribute themselves rather evenly among the five categories.

A consistent picture is also presented from year to year as to the distribution among classes of those who leave. The average is 15 during or at the end of the freshman year; 21 at the end of the sophomore year; 5 or 6 during or at the end of the junior year; and 2 during the senior year. By far the largest group who leave for lack of academic success are included in the second year losses.

Admissions. From the beginning of the College the ratio of students who apply to those admitted has varied from an average of $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 in the first year to as high as $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 in 1938. It is now about 3 to 1. The ratio as of August 15 for the new class admitted, 3.1 to 1, is a little higher than for last year. These ratios of $2\frac{1}{2}$, 3, and 4 to 1 are very high compared with other colleges for women or men. They assure us a full class of good quality each autumn. I have the figures from other institutions but they are never published for some reason.

That Bennington is assured this autumn of a full student body of the same good quality as heretofore does not mark it out as extraordinary. From the figures of all higher institutions compiled annually we find that men's colleges face a decrease averaging from 10 to 15%. This is a severe problem for them. Of the 81 women's colleges reporting, however, only 8 expect a decrease in enrolment, 22 an increase, and 51 (those with fixed capacity for the most part) will remain the same.

As to class quality, the solemn pronouncements of seniors and faculty members each autumn that this year's class is a good class or a bad class are almost laughably unreliable. The only accurate thing that the available evidence would indicate that one can say about the nine Bennington freshman classes and the only reliable forecast about the one to enter this fall is that Bennington freshman groups are remarkably alike in quality. This is not fully measured by the scholastic aptitude tests and other comparable tests. But they are the most reliable measures we have. These indicate for the nine entering classes remarkable uniformity. The median or middle Bennington freshman's score year after year on the Scholastic Aptitude test is about at the 80% point on the scale of all the college students taking the tests. It may run even 3 or 4 points higher on the scale and may fall 7 or 8 points below the 80% point. But

there is no trend up or down. It would be a safe wager with any classmate that the median or average for the class entering in September will be within 5 points of the 80% mark, when final results are known next April.

By a rather elaborate and confidential statistical comparison made a year ago between our aptitude tests given by the American Council on Education and a similar test given by the College Entrance Examination Board, we can now state with confidence that our freshman classes, as judged by this type of test, have almost exactly the same median as the most selective colleges of the East.

Reduced Tuition. Here again there is a uniformity from year to year. The same total amount - approximately \$50,000 - is distributed. The reductions go to the same number of students, 85 to 95 a year, or about one third of the student body. This year's distribution is to 90 students.

Distribution of Majors. We might, under our system of individually-chosen majors, have a college with violent fluctuations of numbers in the various majors. Actually we have had a uniformity in this respect which has created an almost regular pattern. This is it: Social studies, art, literature each $\frac{1}{5}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of the students; theatre arts (alias drama-dance-design) music, science, each $\frac{1}{10}$ of the students. Again a good wager with a classmate in another division would be that her division would not deviate more than 6% from this pattern. There are within these norms short time trends such as from literature to theatre arts or from all fields to social studies and to music, but they do not maintain themselves for more than two years.

There are other figures disillusioning to the worriers: the Bennington faculty salaries having a median higher, so far as I can ascertain, than any independent woman's college in the country, and equal to the most highly endowed men's colleges outside the

great university graduate school centers, etc., etc.

One change there will be when you return this fall. A new president will be at the head. The imaginative romantics and calamity howlers might make much of this. But those who base their predictions on the experience of other colleges with change of executives would say that things will go on as they have before, except that there will be that kind of new enthusiasm, renewed drive and loyalty - a sort of honeymoon period - such as characterized the first years of the College and which is usually renewed in the first years of fresh, able leadership. So it is a reliable prediction from the available evidence that you will be entering or reentering a college with a more interesting four years ahead than would otherwise be the normal expectation.

With every good wish,

Robert D. Leigh

NOTICE TO FACULTY!

First faculty meeting, Tuesday, Sept. 2, at 5 p.m. in the rehearsal room at Fairview. Buffet supper to follow.

Faculty Notes

Ellery Sedgwick, Gertrude Feliu and Nora Hasenclever (part-time) have been appointed to the Literature Division. Mr. Sedgwick has taught at Harvard and Radcliffe and resigned recently to finish a book on Herman Melville. Miss Feliu, a native of Barcelona, has held two Rockefeller fellowships, and spent a year working for the ministry of Education in Venezuela. Miss Hasenclever has taught at the Instituto Escuela in Madrid and is now at Russell Sage College. She will come up to teach Spanish during Miss Feliu's absence. Mrs. Butler, who has been teaching French at Smith, will return to the Literature faculty.

Dr. Dorothy Hager has been appointed College Physician for next year. She attended Simmons College and received her M.D. from the College of Physicians and Surgeons. She will also be associated with Dr. Woodhull Hall in Bennington. Hildegard Peplau has been made Executive Officer of the Health Service. Gertrude Martin, R.N. Vermont, 1938, will take Miss Taylor's place as Nurse.

Mrs. Marie Polanyi has been appointed to the Science Division for next year. She has recently been employed as mathematical assistant to a consulting engineer in London. Dr. Karl Polanyi will return in the fall as a scholar in residence under a grant in aid from the Rockefeller Foundation.

George A. C. Holt, recently assistant to Edward W. Forbes at Harvard University, has been appointed to the Art Division. He has been connected with the Fogg Art Museum, the Boston Center for Adult Education, and the Byzantine Institute of America.

Horst Mendershausen will join the Social Studies Division this fall. He has worked for the National Bureau of Economic Research and taught at Colorado College. Mr. and Mrs. McCamy are returning to Bennington after two years in Washington, where Mr. McCamy was assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture. Miss Patterson will return to Bennington this September, and postpone her sabbatical leave until the second semester. Caroline Moore has been appointed head teacher in the Nursery School, and Carolyn Clement, Bennington, '38, will be her assistant.

Virginia Nolte will replace Margaret Aué in the Music Division during the first semester. Miss Lowell will also be on leave this fall, her place to be taken by Arlie Furman. Mr. and Mrs. McBride will be away for the first semester on a concert tour of South America under the auspices of the League of Composers.