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Symposium Report of the Bennington College Board of Trustees



June 1994

Dear Friend of Bennington:

When I joined the Bennington Board of Trustees eleven years ago, I thought that the Board's principal task was to help the College through its moments of crisis and on its way to a future of financial abundance and general serenity. I imagined sunny upland meadows, those groves of academe where sweet discourse could occur. That was before my Bennington education.

I should have known what the ancient Greeks knew well: Character determines fate. If peaceful groves and sweet discourse are not in its character, neither will they be in its fate. Unable to be certain with itself, Bennington lives by putting its principles continually to the question. Like a gambler or a poet, the place is in love with the risk. It is Bennington's character to live on the edge.

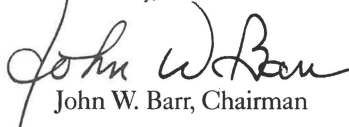
What comes to mind is the figure of the gyroscope. Our College was born out of disequilibrium, in opposition to other movements, other orders of education. For sixty years it has proceeded by seeming to threaten, not infrequently, to spin out of control. Yet the truth is that this College gains stability not from motionlessness but from a blur of motion, not from states of rest but from unrelenting restlessness.

One learns, too, from watching Bennington precess, how creativity is not only radical, but also deeply conservative in nature. The forces that make it seem at times a place of artificial gravity, denied trajectories, make it also a place where bearings may be taken, where people can learn inertial navigation.

"Old men ought to be explorers," T.S. Eliot tells us. So should colleges. "We must be still and still moving/Into another intensity...."

Some experiments deserve to go on forever. The Board of Trustees hopes that this report will sustain your belief that Bennington is one of them.

Sincerely,


John W. Barr, Chairman
Board of Trustees

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ENNINGTON REGARDS EDUCATION

AS A SENSUAL AND ETHICAL, NO LESS THAN AN INTELLECTUAL, PROCESS.

IT SEEKS TO LIBERATE AND NURTURE THE INDIVIDUALITY, THE CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE, AND THE ETHICAL AND AESTHETIC SENSIBILITY OF ITS STUDENTS, TO THE END THAT THEIR RICHLY VARIED NATURAL ENDOWMENTS WILL BE DIRECTED TOWARD SELF-FULFILLMENT AND TOWARD CONSTRUCTIVE SOCIAL PURPOSES. WE BELIEVE THAT THESE EDUCATIONAL GOALS ARE BEST SERVED BY DEMANDING OF OUR STUDENTS ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING OF THEIR OWN PROGRAMS, AND IN THE REGULATION OF THEIR OWN LIVES ON CAMPUS. STUDENT FREEDOM IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF RESTRAINT, HOWEVER; IT IS RATHER THE FULLEST POSSIBLE SUBSTITUTION OF HABITS OF SELF-RESTRAINT FOR RESTRAINT IMPOSED BY OTHERS. THE EXERCISE OF STUDENT FREEDOM IS THE VERY CONDITION OF FREE CITIZENS, DEDICATED TO CIVILIZED VALUES AND CAPABLE OF CREATIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE MEMBERSHIP IN MODERN SOCIETY.”

*Traditional Bennington College commencement
statement, read at every graduation since 1936*

S*ix decades after its founding, Bennington College looks to the future with a single goal: to animate its mission as a pioneering liberal arts institution by reaffirming its deepest principles, liberating itself from outdated programs, and continually cultivating ideas on the vanguard.*

At its inception, Bennington sought to treat students as protagonists in their own education; it sought to include the visual and performing arts as legitimate, full-fledged elements of the liberal arts curriculum; it sought a conscious elasticity in curriculum and student educational plans; it sought to foster individual creativity as a marriage of passion and discipline; it sought to treat education as a sensual and ethical, no less than an intellectual, process; and it sought by example rather than exhortation to make some of these ideas safe enough for modified adoption by mainstream institutions.

By any measure, the College succeeded. But over time, the intellectual and artistic restlessness on which a pioneering institution depends has diminished and been replaced by a growing attachment to the status quo that, if unattended, is lethal to Bennington's purpose and pedagogy. Even if Bennington were free of the financial pressures that plague higher education today—which it is decidedly not—the need to reanimate its aims, abandon old habits, and build more flexible structures would be a condition of a vibrant and valued future.

This report is a summary of The Symposium, a year-long process established by the Board of Trustees to determine conditions for renewal and change. It seeks to restore Bennington's distinction as a principled, leading-edge institution, in part by challenging several sacred cows of higher education with new ideas designed to bring the College's programs and resources more in line with its original philosophy and aims.

THE SYMPOSIUM

A year and a half ago, the Board of Trustees concluded that Bennington had achieved the continuity of presidential leadership that a radical reconsideration of the College's future was likely to require. It then began a preparation for material changes to be implemented in June 1994. The Board sought relevant models of successful renewal and found none. It then studied substantially unsuccessful efforts to effect change at a host of sister colleges and universities. The lesson of these failed attempts was that for transforming suggestions to prevail, the College had to find a way to make important ideas transcend the politics of self-preservation.

The search for good ideas demanded an inclusive process where no participants had special status and any thoughtful voice had equal claim on the Board's attention. Against all outside advice, the Trustees decided to solicit, by individual invitation from the Chairman of the Board, concerns and proposals on a wide and open-ended range of issues from every member of the faculty, every student, every staff member, every alumna and alumnus, and dozens of friends of the College. Public forums chaired by the President and the Deans, often attended by Trustees, were held on campus and in cities across the country. At the same time, conversations began with men and women outside the Bennington community.

The Board made it clear from the outset that while this process was unequivocally inclusive, it could not be consensual. It would be the Trustees' responsibility to evaluate the advice the Board received *vis à vis* Bennington's philosophic commitments and its human, physical, and financial resources. In so doing, the Board did not intend to create a mechanical blueprint for the College's operations; but it did intend to reaffirm principles, to jump-start a number of college-wide programs, and to create flexible, renewing structures that would be assessed and modified—by faculty, students, staff, and trustees—on an ongoing basis.

Some in the College community were skeptical that such an inclusive and open-ended process would yield much that was useful. A few were cynical, not trusting a process in which ideas—not rank, seniority, or position—would be paramount. Yet in the end, more than 600 people contributed their thoughts. Every facet of the College—its ethos, governance, organization, curriculum—became subject to examination. What emerged was a survey of critical issues in American higher education, a remarkable convergence around first principles, a significant discussion of relevant interests and concerns, and many stimulating, doable proposals.

ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

It is a commonplace that higher education in America is in crisis. From issues of mission and quality to issues of cost, access, and accountability, colleges and universities are under escalating pressure to adapt to a contracting and more exacting environment. Many blame the economy, arguing that discovery is an inherently expansive activity not easily pursued under conditions of constraint. Others blame administrators, either for lacking courage or for failing to mobilize faculties in enthusiastic support of transforming change. Some blame faculties, believing that they are increasingly preoccupied with rights rather than responsibilities. Boards of trustees reap blame too, for being either overly aloof for too long or overly engaged too late.

The sweep of concerns across the country is immense. Many are, in fact, external to Bennington, but are representative of the climate of higher education in which Bennington functions. Among those raised during the Symposium that the Board finds especially notable are these:

- ◆ The fashionable, conflicting pressures for uniform cultural literacy or, in the alternative, for politically correct fragments of inquiry, obscure the underlying purposes and requirements of liberal learning. These pressures come from the right and the left, from the intellectual and the anti-intellectual. The argument is often about substituting one centrism (e.g., Euro, male, or white) with another (e.g., Afro, female, or brown). The challenge is rarely framed in terms of teaching students a kind of “double vision,” where the strange and the familiar are in fruitful interaction.
- ◆ The idea that truth is contingent (and therefore in constant need of pursuit) is increasingly confused with the mistaken notion that truth is relative (and therefore ephemeral or irrelevant). This mistake can lead to a disinterest in the quest for meaning and eventually to a disregard for truth altogether, devastating a free society.
- ◆ In the academy, the humanities and the social sciences have become self-consciously preoccupied with method and technique, diminishing a broad concern for culture itself. Scholasticism of this kind is unintelligible to non-specialists and therefore uneducating; it serves to create insular priesthoods instead of open communities of learning. Under these circumstances, students often become acolytes, devoted to a parochial, technical competence instead of to questioning and experimentation.

- ◆ A robust social ethic—yielding a sense of accomplishment when things go well and of culpability when they do not—is decomposing into a protectionist personal ethic—a protection *of* individual privilege or gain and *against* individual accountability. As a result, an understanding of and commitment to the whole—the community, the country, the planet—is hard to sustain. Also threatened is a feeling for the conditions of order and integration on which individual liberty and autonomy paradoxically depend.
- ◆ For all their promise, exploding technologies also evaporate the time and distance reflection demands, with Nintendo-style reactions sometimes substituting for real thought. Too often, the human imagination has been abducted, not released, by the new media. Liberal arts colleges need to appropriate these technologies not as ends in themselves, but as means to amplify creative and reflective purposes.
- ◆ The structure of work in the society is in the midst of destabilizing, uncertain transformations, abetting a pernicious vocational anxiety among students, parents, and even educators. While students are told that they are likely to hold more than seven different jobs in their lifetimes, few colleges conscientiously foster the attributes of resilience and honest self-assessment that are likely to help students thrive in a changing environment.
- ◆ The cost of a college education is increasingly beyond the reach of many students and their families. Too many students graduate from college more encumbered by debt than emancipated by education.
- ◆ As a general matter, boards of trustees, presidents, and faculties are without the tools of renewal. College budgets should be rational planning instruments, but they almost never are. Fixed costs are high; choice and flexibility are almost nil. Established programs are rarely reevaluated and new programs almost never displace or transform old ones. Traditional organizational arrangements further paralyze the system by failing to build in requirements for continuous improvement and reassessment. Until new structures are created that support the capacity of colleges to make changes and choices, college budgets and programs will be used to protect the past and keep the peace, not to challenge, adapt to, and plan for the future.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Within this context the Board concurs with a majority of Symposium participants that Bennington should be conscientiously progressive, innovative, and pioneering. To that end:

- ◆ Bennington will stay committed to a student-centered, rather than an instruction-centered, education. As one participant put it, Bennington should help its students compose 600 variations on a single major. That major is widely seen not as a set of subjects but as a set of capacities and dispositions: reflection, action, rigor, expression, independence, collaboration, excellence, resilience, and an impulse toward meaning and truth.
- ◆ Bennington will respect tradition, but will not be bound by convention. All liberal learning—from philosophy to physics to poetry to painting—should be taught as a performing art by teacher-practitioners who teach, in the words of one, what keeps them awake at night.
- ◆ Intellectually rigorous dialogue around the act of making—whether it be artifacts, ideas, or experiments—will be the College’s dominant pedagogic method and the source of its special intensity. This method is consistent with the notion that liberal education exists not to instruct students in the acquisition of vocational skills, but to educate each student’s passions.
- ◆ Ways to expand the relationship between the College and the world will be aggressively pursued to concentrate and expand the potential for intellectual excellence within the College and to enrich the quality of public life without.
- ◆ From an organizational perspective, Bennington will reincorporate an institutional preference for experiment, mindful always of the need to distinguish fad from frontier. The College recognizes that a permanent position on the frontier requires a capacity for renewal that is hard to institutionalize and even harder to sustain.
- ◆ Above all, Bennington cannot prevail if it tolerates mediocrity or complacency in any dimension of its institutional life.

THE SYMPOSIUM DISCUSSION

The Board endorsed several specific practices and programs as important to keep, either in their current or in some modified form. Chief among these are the four-year degree program, the individualized Student Plan at the heart of the curriculum, academic counseling as the Plan's necessary corollary, written evaluations in lieu of unannotated grades, and field work.

Beyond these endorsements, the Symposium generated an imposing range of ideas. Some of these were considered but rejected, while others informed the whole of the Board's deliberations. Some ideas have been forwarded to others for development and others are still under consideration. Illustrations of each of these categories follow. The remainder of this report will then be devoted to leading ideas, ideas that the College will begin to implement in June 1994.

As an example of a considered but rejected idea, the Board revisited the issue of coeducation. A small but vocal number of alumni thought seriously about whether Bennington should return to its origins as a single-sex school. The reasons in support of this idea ranged from an overriding concern for women's education to a belief that incidents of vandalism, substance abuse, and other behavioral problems on American campuses are significantly fewer at all-women schools. The Trustees discussed these matters and concluded that Bennington's educational mission transcends gender and that the College should remain open to both women and men.

Examples of ideas that informed the whole abound. For instance, many participants felt that Bennington had lost sight of the "other half of freedom." By this it was meant that now more than ever, students and faculty need to grapple with the conditions of freedom—the framework of order in a community—on which individual liberty depends. Some felt that it would be particularly important in the next decades to emphasize the connection between the pursuit of one's own work and the well-being of one's communities. This sense of interdependence was formulated in many ways, often leading to suggestions for programs centered around public service and care for the environment or calls for clearer standards of civility and magnanimity. Specific program initiatives in this regard are described on the following pages.

An example of ideas being forwarded to others emerged from a discussion of the Field Work Term. Notwithstanding general support for the importance of field work, a number of participants wondered whether present-day employment, housing, and safety considerations dictated a

rethinking of the Field Work Term in its present form. Others thought that the Field Work Term needed to be more firmly reconnected to the reflective element of a student's course of study. Still others wondered whether first-year students were well served by the requirement to leave campus for their first Field Work Term after a single fourteen-week term on campus. In response to these concerns, a Field Work Study Group composed of faculty, students, and staff, will develop prototypes for faculty review over the next year. A similar study will be made of ideas for modifications of the current College calendar.

Still under consideration is a range of economic concerns. Some people despaired over the cost of private higher education altogether, noting that schools with significant endowments seem no more able to contain costs than those without them. The Trustees were urged to think about multiple ways to bring a Bennington education within the reach of most prospective students and their families. Recognizing that handcrafted educations are likely to stay more expensive than mass-produced ones, the Board is pursuing several approaches to the problem. Foremost is a restructuring of faculty and administration that places a premium on collaboration and productivity. Another is a novel restructuring of the budget and the budget process. In the search for ways to do much more or much better at the same or lower cost, every cost center in the College will be subject to reorganization. Work-study programs will also be extended to more students in new ways. All of these approaches are further elaborated below.

LEADING IDEAS AND INITIATIVES

The ideas the Board believes will lead the College to distinction in its next decades are highly interconnected. Although described one after another in three major categories—organizational, financial, and programmatic—they should also be considered in interpenetrating and aggregate ways. Many of these ideas take the College into new territory where it is impossible to know ahead of time how close the relationship will be between intended outcomes of policies and their actual consequences. They are offered, therefore, to the community in the spirit of trying things out, assessing and revising as the College learns more, modifying when experience and new opportunities warrant.

ORGANIZATION

All academic programs—existing and new—will be undertaken in a common organizational frame. In particular, the Board has developed an experimental method for small college administration in which responsibility is decentralized but integrated; challenging ideas are encouraged and rewarded; collaborations and alliances are sought. Its key elements are faculty and administrative restructuring, community life, alternative contracts and discretionary budgets, supporting faculty and alliances, and facilities.

FACULTY RESTRUCTURING

By July 1995, the academic heart of the College will be a Core Faculty composed entirely of teacher-practitioners, small enough to constitute a coherent, responsible authority, while large enough to represent a diverse combination of intellectual and artistic excellence and creativity. The Core Faculty will be composed of those faculty who meet the teacher-practitioner and programmatic criteria formally adopted by the Board as part of the College redesign, and new appointments.

Academic divisions will be eliminated—not least of all because for too many students, divisional requirements have effectively displaced individually developed and defended programs as a principal organizing force in each student's educational plan. In some cases, divisions have also become retreats or asylums, devoted to the status quo and disconnected from the ambitions of the College as a whole, instead of home bases from which students and faculty could journey to explore other domains of learning and expression.

In their place, the Core Faculty will be invited to organize itself into polymorphous, dynamically changing Faculty Program Groups in which scholars, artists, and scientists with converging interests collaborate to frame and develop expansive programs for students and each other. Typically, Faculty Program Groups will be associations of three to five faculty members with overlapping interests in multifaceted subjects. Faculty Program Groups will also be responsible for supervising each student's major or area of concentration. Although all divisions will be relinquished, most disciplines will not. Individual members of the Core Faculty will continue to teach their disciplines, but they will generally belong to several Faculty Program Groups rather than a single academic department.

When such a group is formed, it will propose a plan, suggest its initial duration, and recommend terms of subsequent reviews and evaluations. The combination of disciplines and courses offered, the Faculty Program Groups, and specific College-wide initiatives will constitute the curriculum and its organization. Responsibility for the coherence and quality of the complete curriculum will be assumed by the Core Faculty, the Deans, and the President.

ADMINISTRATIVE RESTRUCTURING

In a modified but parallel way, extensive administrative restructuring will include a system of Administrative Program Groups in which staff across the campus will coalesce into small working groups that cross traditional administrative offices. Routine tasks in different departments will be amalgamated, freeing human and material resources for projects and problem solving aimed at improving the educational and residential life of the College. The offices of the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Studies will be consolidated into a single Office of the Dean of the College and will be reorganized to service a more decentralized faculty structure. A new office of the Dean of Admissions and of the Freshman Year will provide continuous assistance for each student from his or her first expression of interest in the College through the entire first year on campus.

New governance structures that support a less atomized, more collegial culture need to be developed by Core Faculty, students, and staff with the approval of the Board. The Trustees' preference is that the College begin with a clean slate, spending much of the 1994-95 academic year developing ideas for new ways of linking and distributing obligations and authority. Responsibility for organizing these explorations and for overseeing the College's affairs in the transition to new structures will be allocated as follows: The President will work with the Core Faculty and the Dean of the College on structures related to curriculum oversight and to personnel; the Deans will work with Core Faculty and students on structures related to educational plans, academic counseling, and specific curricular assessment and modification; the Dean of the Freshman Year and the Office of Student Life will work with students and faculty on structures related to campus governance and residential life; and the President and Vice Presidents will work with the administrative staff to reorganize management structures. As in other organizational changes, a premium will be placed on governance structures that embody principles of self-

governance in which self-governance is understood to refer to the generation of personal and community standards from within rather than the imposition of expectations from without, or the absence of standards and expectations altogether.

COMMUNITY LIFE

The corrosion of community so deeply felt on most campuses is especially painful in a small college. The general sources of the problem are endemic to society, exacerbated, perhaps, by circumstances particular to Bennington. These include a doubling of the College's size in the 1970s without regard to the ensuing disruption of old habits of collegiality and leadership; more recently, a sometimes intemperate celebration of individualism without regard to consequences; and, over time, a trend toward a less residential faculty without regard to the College's educational reliance on the interdependence of community and academic life.

During the Symposium, the community received an exceptionally thoughtful and thorough report from a campus committee making important recommendations in every area of the College's residential life. During the 1994-95 academic year, the Board will formally ask students, faculty, and staff to refocus on those recommendations, particularly with respect to student governance, student housing, recreational events and facilities, interactions with local communities, substance abuse, and the fusion of residential life and academic life.

The entire College will also be invited to think about something akin to covenants that could be binding on all members of this voluntary community. Although the word "covenants" might initially strike some as puritanical or coercive, the idea is to make explicit the threshold values on which the educational mission of the Bennington community depends. Traditionally, these values have been implicit, not unlike the "habits of the heart" Tocqueville described as characteristic of American citizens without which, he argued, American individualism would cannibalize the free institutions that guarantee their liberty. The events of recent decades have revealed the national need to rediscover and recommit to such values. The question for the Bennington community is whether such mutual understandings would increase the likelihood of sustaining the conditions of each individual's intellectual, artistic, and personal freedom.

Throughout this process it is important to keep in mind that in renewing Bennington's capacity to function as a coherent, dynamic whole, the College also needs to ensure room and protection for individual

differences, unconventional thought, and provocative and stimulating views. Any new structures the College establishes and refines must embody procedures as responsive to the rights and responsibilities of diverse individuals as they are to the priorities and prerogatives of the community.

ALTERNATIVE FACULTY CONTRACTS

Nearly all colleges and universities have a tenure-track system. Typically, junior faculty are hired for an initial period; they are then reviewed for a possible second appointment; and those who qualify are subsequently reviewed for a tenure appointment—an appointment for life without ongoing evaluations. For several decades Bennington offered only one- to five-year contracts. The College still does not offer traditional tenure contracts: In the last decades, Bennington employed a presumptive tenure system with five-year reviews. The Trustees have studied the results of the last twenty years of presumptive tenure at the College and have decided to initiate an experimental contract system in its stead. Under the new system, faculty experimentation and innovation will be invited and rewarded; the faculty member and the institution make explicit commitments to each other relating the faculty member's plans and performance to those of the College as a whole. Hence, as of July 1994, the College will offer no presumptive tenure contracts to newly-hired faculty or to faculty not now presumptively tenured.

DISCRETIONARY BUDGETS

The Core Faculty will be supported by an Experiment and Innovation (E&I) Budget designed to ensure unprecedented flexibility in the College budgeting process. This discretionary budget will be available to Core Faculty, usually by way of Faculty Program Groups, to expand students' reach and capacities. Its object is to free up capital *on an ongoing basis* for new programs and people. There will be no *a priori* limits to the possible uses of the E&I budget in pursuit of educational ideas. These allocations can enable Core Faculty to bring visiting faculty to campus for a year, a term, a month, or a couple of days. Equally, these allocations can enable students to visit other learning sites, either in the field or in collaborating institutions. These funds can be used to purchase or rent equipment, software, and supplies for student projects and to support other activities that bring students' work into living contact with the world-at-large. By institutionalizing faculty imagination and entrepreneurship on behalf of the

College as a whole, Bennington will structurally link the flexible use of human and material resources with both the constant and the changing needs and interests of students.

The process for distributing the E&I budget will be formal but not cumbersome. Proposals will be evaluated by a committee of faculty and administrators and forwarded to the President. Proposals may request up to three years of funding, but in all cases, any long-term programs must be built into the ordinary academic budget by displacing or transforming a current cost center. Oversight of these projects will be the responsibility of the Office of the Dean of the College.

This element of the new structure is integral to Bennington's redesign. Whether an E&I budget pegged at 10 percent of tuition revenues (the Board's current target) will turn out to be the right number will be evaluated as the program evolves; the Board is committed to the principle, however, of tying the E&I budget to tuition revenues, creating an honest, "value-added" link between discretionary resources and discretionary programs.

ROTATING AND SUPPORTING FACULTY

In addition to the Core Faculty, six faculty positions will be reserved for promising, less experienced faculty appointed on a rotating basis across the curriculum (two appointments each year beginning in 1995-96). These faculty will come to Bennington at the beginning of their careers, but the presumption is that at the conclusion of their appointments, they will continue at other institutions.

By way of the E&I budget, Core Faculty also will be able to invite supporting faculty to campus for less extended stays to help expand students' educational programs or amplify a particular program initiative.

COLLABORATIONS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND ALLIANCES

A critical new objective in these policies is to promote collaborations as a fundamental *modus operandi* for the College from both within and without. Arrangements of this kind—alliances with other institutions, partnerships with other programs—extend the imaginative reach of the College by continually bringing outside resources to bear on promising ideas. By combining rather than fragmenting resources, the College intends to create a culture that blends financial efficiencies with educational entrepreneurship—a spirit of assuming risk for educational gain. The

management challenges and financial advantages of such combined efforts are several, but the success of these programs depends on a faculty that is genuinely open to better ideas and organized for experiment and adaptation. Many major collaborations are under review and those described on the following pages are under active development.

FACILITIES

The Symposium's organizing principle—that all ideas under consideration be vividly linked to the College's purposes—is especially evident in thinking about facilities and architectural matters. The College has an inspiring physical site. As college campuses go, it is safe and beautiful. Its 550 acres and scores of buildings available to fewer than 600 resident students could become a valuable resource for change. Not only can the College's relationship to its natural environment become a concrete expression of its ideals, its architecture can become an energizing embodiment of its purposes.

The Board concurs with the findings of a recent study that large quantities of usable space are unduly limited by spatial characteristics, by divisional and individual territoriality, and by habit. Several of the facilities issues enumerated during the Symposium—including the need for an indoor recreational facility—can be met by reorganizing, redeploying, and mixing the uses of existing spaces. Other spaces are candidates for refurbishment and modernization. The Board also remains committed to a significant increase in library capacity before the conclusion of the Capital Campaign. Necessarily, priority will be given to projects in which funding opportunities and/or economic efficiencies converge with need.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUMMARY

Entrenched organizational arrangements are widely regarded as the greatest impediments to any deep restructuring of higher education. The resistance to reforming these circumstances is enormous; indeed, talk about this kind of change was recently characterized by sophisticated commentators as “foolish bravery,” enormously desirable but impossible to effect. The Trustees understand that these structural changes are momentous and, therefore, unavoidably controversial; but in the Board's view, their objectives strike at the heart of the matter.

A smaller, more flexibly organized faculty—with greater responsibility linked to commensurate authority—is intended to enable each

faculty member to work more freely on behalf of the College as a whole. The elimination of academic divisions is intended to reflect more accurately current artistic and intellectual inquiry, simultaneously bringing the reality of a handcrafted student education much closer to its promise. The establishment of a set-aside budget for faculty discretionary spending is an authentic commitment to innovation and renewal. Taken together, these changes should facilitate the match between a student and the dedicated practitioner and gifted teacher who treats students as junior colleagues by inviting them, from the very beginning, into the thick of his or her own working life.

FINANCES

The traditional cost and management structures of colleges today are no longer defensible or viable. As with every other institution in the society, increasing quality must henceforth be realized at lower cost. The trouble is, the history of higher education in America is by and large one of *ad hoc* expansion, not of revision and refinement. Colleges are in the habit of adding services and resources on behalf of increased quality, but mightily resist relinquishing a program, a discipline, a faculty position, or an administrative support job in exchange. For ordinary human reasons, educational institutions have tended to develop by accretion, not by metamorphosis, almost always trying to do better by getting larger and spending more.

As a consequence, very few American families can now afford the requisite fees without financial aid. An ever-increasing percentage of students attending colleges and universities receive support. Bennington is no longer the most expensive college in the country because in the last three years, the College held increases in tuition well below the national average; yet during the same period, the percentage of the entering class requiring financial aid has jumped from 53 percent to 74 percent. These national trends are unsustainable and are forcing all colleges to rethink their cost assumptions.

Another baseline reality is that Bennington will remain a tuition-driven school. Its first class of graduates is largely alive and hardy. Its earliest classes were small (95 students on average) and increases to endowment from bequests will have steady but modest impact over the next decade. Its range of supplementary sources of income are limited: Revenues from summer and low-residency graduate programs continue to grow substantially and now account for 21 percent of the operating

budget. The College became coeducational and nearly doubled in size in 1970; these alumni, twenty years later, are just beginning to make a difference to fund raising. And private philanthropy from non-alumni may flourish if the College reassumes its historic willingness to press for alternative approaches to problems. But realistically, financial stability will require 65 percent of the cost of a Bennington education to be met by students and their families for a very long time to come. Combined with a commitment to improving student programs while containing costs below the rate of inflation, this fact confers a powerful discipline on educational and financial planning.

Bennington aims to bring the structures and processes of the College in line with its mission and purposes. Especially important is to establish a dynamic financial structure that supports innovation and continual improvement by encouraging an ongoing reworking of means and ends instead of protecting self-perpetuating interests and practices. The commitment to a discretionary program budget, to specific cost control guidelines, and to clear financial benchmarks dominates the College's reformulated financial structures.

BUDGETING

The College budget is being reorganized to become a flexible instrument with significant discretionary spending that can respond to the evolving educational needs of our students and the changing demands of our times. It will take five years to implement fully the Experiment and Innovation Budget described earlier, but its impact will be enormous by providing a replenishing pool of investment capital for new and better ideas.

GUIDELINES

In order not to layer on new costs, the Board has established firm financial guidelines for determining the feasibility of programmatic ideas. If a new program requires significant capital investment or operating costs, the proposal must be supported by a pay-out schedule demonstrating cost savings and/or program displacement over a reasonable discount period. If a new program entails significant start-up costs (usually for a one-time period of duplication and overlapping organization), the proposal must demonstrate how and when the ongoing costs of the program will be absorbed at no incremental cost to the budget (usually through displacement or transformation of existing programs).

BENCHMARKS

As a direct result of the changes described in this report, the College plans, over the next five years, to build and sustain an enrollment of approximately 600 undergraduates, 50 high-residency graduate students, and 80 low-residency graduate students. The July Program (for high school students) will continue to enroll about 250 students each summer. Annual fund raising and endowment income will contribute 15 percent of the College's requirements. The costs of capital projects will be met by capital gifts.

During the same five-year period, the Trustees' goal is to reduce tuition in 1994 dollars by 10 percent. A number of other ways are being explored to make a Bennington education more affordable for students and their families, including a substantial expansion of work-study programs.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The College cannot save itself into financial stability further than it already has, nor can it spend itself into educational distinction. Instead Bennington is inventing ways of doing better by staying small and supple, spending what the College has differently, and demanding more permeating results. In the near term, the financial condition of the College depends on enrollment, financial aid, cost containment, and diversifying non-tuition sources of support. Ultimately, the Board has fused financial stability to the primacy of ideas. In short, Bennington's financial vigor depends on its ability to capitalize on compelling ideas to become the best college of its kind.

PROGRAMS

All academic programs, existing and new, will be undertaken in a common educational frame: a freshman year of grounding and exploration that does not ask students to defer pursuing their own interests, but does insist that they engage the diversity of intellectual and imaginative life; a sophomore and junior year of increasing immersion and field work; and a senior year that faces outward, exploring and deepening the relationship between one's own work and the work and lives of others that are quite different from one's own.

The Board of Trustees has mandated certain changes to existing programs. It also has distilled a number of Symposium-generated priorities that it will ask the Core Faculty, Deans, and President to develop,

giving special emphasis to those programmatic ideas that are capable of suffusing and transforming the entirety of the enterprise. These programmatic changes and decisions about priorities are elaborated in the sections that follow.

EXISTING PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS

The change to a Core Faculty of teacher-practitioners is effected by reductions, redirections, and consolidations of existing programs, to be implemented by the President on the basis of Board established criteria. Relinquishing the divisional structure will put a premium on faculty who are firmly committed to teaching their disciplines in ways that cut across traditional departmental categories. It will also favor academic programs that are coherent and integrating, in which the acquisition of technique is the by-product, not the aim, of intellectual inquiry and artistic pursuit.

With that in mind, nearly all of the following changes to current programs will be implemented by the President at the beginning of the 1994-95 academic year.

Literature

Literature will be taught by poets, novelists, writers of short stories, essayists, and playwrights. This change marks a return to Bennington's origins. It establishes an alternative to the prevailing theoretical and ideological preoccupations in the teaching of literature, collapsing the distinctions among reader, writer, scholar, and thinker. Literature in a foreign language will be taught by writers capable of teaching in both English and another language. Studying the great works of literature under the guidance of men and women who are themselves distinguished practitioners of these arts will be as powerful for each Bennington student as learning to write under their tutelage.

Foreign Languages

All foreign language learning will be relocated out of the College into a new Regional Language Learning Center for kindergarten through adult learners. Discussions have begun with public and private institutions in the region to join together to teach more languages, more effectively, to more students at substantially reduced, shared costs. The Center's focus will be unequivocally on language competency. Languages taught will include Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish.

Visual and Performing Arts

All music, dance, drama, and visual arts faculty will be professionally active in their disciplines. Music and dance will be taught exclusively by professionally active composers and choreographers. This focus on the activity of making works of art is especially consistent with Bennington's origins. The teaching of musical instruments beyond those provided by composers will be supplemented on an as-needed basis by using the abundant resources in the community-at-large. Where possible, the teaching of music will be augmented by an aggressive use of computer technologies, such as those developed at Stanford University, which have dramatically enhanced the composer's capacity to hear what he or she imagines before assembling an ensemble or orchestra. In the same way, choreographers will be assisted by software such as that developed at Simon Fraser University and used by Merce Cunningham.

Art history will no longer be taught as a separate discipline, but will be studied as an integrated topic connecting history with the activity of making art in the present. Resources will be redeployed to the film/video element of the New Media Program described below. Students of all disciplines will be encouraged to discover ways of incorporating the moving image into their repertoires of expression. The technology itself will be kept as transparent as possible with emphasis always on its capacity to amplify rather than supplant imaginative and intellectual resources.

Social Sciences

In most settings, the modern fragmentation of the social sciences has discouraged students' pursuit of truth in favor of a premature drive toward utility or specialization. In contrast, the classical practice of social science as public philosophy sought to engage the student in dialogue about matters of common interest. To help refocus students' interest on great questions, the social sciences at Bennington will be consolidated into four major areas: history (political, economic, cultural, intellectual); philosophy (political, economic, aesthetic); anthropology (cultural, political, economic); and psychology (development, cognition, behavior).

Sciences and Mathematics

The biological sciences will continue to anchor the College's science offerings in physics, chemistry, computer science, and biology. The recent provision of an important field station on Mount Equinox, the concern for creating a more ecologically sustainable campus, the new Stickney

Observatory, increasingly sophisticated equipment purchased through scientists' successful grants, and the distinction of the Postbaccalaureate Program in Premedical & Allied Health Sciences contribute to the College's focus and capacities. Especially through the mechanism of Faculty Program Groups, an effort to decrease the isolation of the sciences and mathematics from other elements of the curriculum is a priority.

NEW PROGRAMS

Over time, the Board believes that Bennington's new academic administrative framework—particularly the Core Faculty, Faculty Program Groups, and Experiment and Innovation Budget structures—will be the principal source of new program initiatives. There are a few College-wide directions, however, that the Board is eager to advance at the outset: conditions of individual freedom; the arts; new media technologies; diversity and multiple perspectives; alternative formats; and graduate education. The Board has asked the President, working together with the Deans and the Core Faculty during the 1994-95 academic year, to develop these ideas for implementation.

Conditions of Individual Freedom

A principal new focus of the Bennington curriculum will be to reshape the College around principles that foster the development of an ethos of interdependence. While retaining an abiding commitment to the individual, the Board recommends modifying current programs to strengthen students' understanding of the conditions of personal and cultural freedom on which the lifelong exercise of their individuality depends. Three academic programs have been proposed that bear particularly on these concerns:

- ◆ the study and practice of sound environmental understandings and behaviors leading to the creation of a more environmentally responsible campus;
- ◆ the maturation of intellectual habits of social reflection, an interest in the ideal of the public good, and the habit of public service;
- ◆ a scientific, philosophic, and practical understanding of psychological/biological interactions, especially as they relate to individual development and health.

As part of the College's commitment to alliances and collaborations, these programs would be developed by faculties of many disciplines in partnership with several institutions—especially independent research organizations—that have demonstrated a capacity to advance consideration of these themes.

Environmental Responsibility

Could the College become an environmentally exemplary campus? More than one Symposium participant observed that environmental degradation is more a design problem than a management problem, and in many ways especially suitable as a Bennington venture. The College already boasts a strong environmental studies program at two ecological laboratories—its 550-acre campus in Bennington and a new 900-acre field station in Manchester. But committing the College to studying the complex biological, physical, economic, and social interdependencies that constitute the campus ecology is a major, long-term decision. Implied in such a decision is that the College would act on its research findings, reducing its absolute consumption of energy and natural resources while developing ethically coherent relationships to natural, built, and human environments.

Proposed elements of such an endeavor include: the reestablishment of the College farm, started during World War II, but undertaken in the coming decade as an experiment in sustainable agriculture; the comprehensive retrofit of college buildings to achieve substantial, economic energy efficiencies; and an ongoing audit of resource use combined with consumption-reduction experiments. Ideas for student-led demonstration projects and for potential partnerships are abundant. The state's major utility company, an independent ecosystems research institute, the USDA, and a leading environmental law school are among the organizations that would collaborate with the College in a comprehensive effort. Such a program would also generate internships and apprenticeships for students and provide the College with an important opportunity for productive interaction with the regional community.

Social Responsibility

The suggestion that the College more effectively merge the ideal of personal freedom with public responsibility was strongly urged by many alumni and staff and some faculty and students. While most colleges have large and active volunteer programs like Phillips Brooks House at Harvard

or the Haas Center at Stanford, they typically have failed to build in ways of rigorously reflecting on those experiences in the classroom. One ambitious idea that has emerged would be to establish a project in collaboration with the National Service Program in which eligible students would work in public service jobs during the winter and the summer terms, intertwined with a four-year academic program encompassing the range of Bennington's curriculum, including a heavy emphasis on social reflection. Another idea is to establish a program in which small groups of students would undertake projects with local community agencies supported by related academic courses. For example, every Bennington student might tutor a young person in the community—an idea, coined in another context, as “each one, teach one”—making deliberate use of those experiences in one or more of his or her courses.

Still other ideas have emerged from students interested in making more concrete the individual's responsibility for the well-being of the College community. In this regard, one intriguing proposal from recent alumni is to invite students to apprentice to maintenance professionals. Having acquired rudimentary skills, students would support the work of the professional staff, accelerating deferred maintenance and other refurbishment schedules. Such a program would be anything but make-work, providing real value to the College. It would also involve the maintenance staff in the teaching life of the College while educating students who have evinced a genuine interest in mastering such crafts.

The College will test a number of these kinds of proposals in an effort to develop ways of informing our students' work, whatever that might be, now and in the future, with a deepened commitment to public service and the common good.

Personal Responsibility

Like the discoveries of the last century which led to the theory of evolution by natural selection and a new comprehension of our human origins, emerging scientific discoveries of this century seem poised to revolutionize civilization's understanding of our most human attributes—emotions and thought. Part of the current research program in neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, paleontology, linguistics, and philosophy is to connect the mind (which, to paraphrase William James, is not a thing, it is what the brain does—perceiving, remembering, learning, imagining) to the developing understandings of the brain. The subject meets Bennington's criteria for inclusion in its curriculum: It is personally

compelling, it embraces the entire curriculum, it is a genuine intellectual frontier, and it is fundamental to a deeper appreciation of what it means to be human. Insights are possible from almost any perspective or discipline, and in this instance, student investigators come with a built-in laboratory and usable data—themselves and their experiences.

The theme of this program is, in effect, the ecology of self. Just as ecology seeks to teach students about their physical world and to question their responsibility for its well-being, and public service seeks to teach students about their social world and to question their responsibility for its well-being, so a program exploring the complex relationships between mind and body seeks to teach students about themselves and to question their responsibility for their own well-being.

To reiterate, the object of this set of program ideas is not to teach students how to live—it is to ask them to examine how they wish to live. History abounds with painful evidence that freedom must be learned. Underscoring the complex interdependencies between thought and action, these programs would seek to make it clear that things are not as simple as they seem and that personal action has public consequence. The nature of these inquiries should be experimental, not didactic. They are intended as ongoing, open-ended research projects where the laboratories are the natural and built environments of the campus, the social environments at all scales, and the individual environments of self.

The Arts

One of the College's most significant early innovations was to encourage—largely by example—the acceptance in higher education of the visual and performing arts as *bona fide* elements of the liberal arts curriculum. Having succeeded in that initial effort (most colleges and universities now accept work and majors in the arts in fulfillment of the baccalaureate degree), it is time to make a bold move from acceptance of the arts in the curriculum toward the mobilization of their capacity to integrate diverse components of a liberal education. In so doing, the arts will cease being almost equal but segregated entities on liberal arts campuses, becoming instead an institutional force for collaboration and creativity.

In the course of the Symposium, a model emerged compatible with such an idea. The making of new work—already at the center of a Bennington student's education in the arts—would become a universal expectation in every discipline. Students' interests would be nourished by an increasingly diverse (versus specialized) and carefully considered (versus

ad hoc) array of intellectual and imaginative sources. While such an education would be emphatically multidisciplinary, it would also demand an unusual degree of focus determined by the particular values and capacities of the student. In more conventional terms, it is as if the entire Core Faculty constituted a "Division of the Whole" and every student majored in "New Work."

In a Bennington education, no discussion of the arts should fail to address the place of history, theory, and basic technique. The College is emphatically committed to a liberal arts, not a conservatory, education. More than honing technique in pursuit of virtuosity, it seeks to nurture creativity shaped by a maturing capacity. Moreover, instead of contriving some deceptively reassuring balance between competing priorities, it seeks to make the discovery of connections of all kinds the very center of the enterprise. In this model of an education, an artist's indifference to history, for example, becomes unthinkable, as does a historian's indifference to art.

By bringing the ambition of the artist to the library and the laboratory, the College can advance the cause of a higher education devoted to the development of productive imagination, mobilizing the visual and performing arts as a leading source for integration across the curriculum.

Technology

Bennington has recently been selected as one of twenty-one New Media Center sites sponsored by the New Media Center Initiatives Program of a consortium of hardware and software companies led by Apple Computer, SuperMac Technology, Eastman Kodak, and Adobe. Bennington's selection was based on several ideas the College proposed for broadening the range of individual and collective inquiry in the arts and sciences. The organizing elements of these plans are:

Emerging Technology Applications

Under development and evaluation by the faculty director of the New Media Program are proposals for "virtual" studios and laboratories, as well as individual tutorials that accelerate learning trajectories. Architecture, biology, chemistry, dance, drama, film/video, music, and physics are likely candidates for the early development of electronic studios and labs. Interestingly, wherever the New Media Center is located physically, these studios and labs are all transportable into each student's computer, suggesting endless possible synergies.

The Portfolio

Students will assemble an ongoing electronic portfolio of their work at the College on CD-ROM as a requirement for graduation, assuring multimedia literacy of all Bennington graduates. This portfolio will be a valuable teaching tool, permitting the elaboration and recasting of problems and projects as students' experiences, abilities, and priorities develop over time, as well as the means to undertake a formal four-year review as part of each student's senior year program.

Bennington's emphasis in teaching the new media technologies is determinedly on the amplification of student and faculty creative capacities. This is a more complex commitment than it first appears. Technology has the power to tempt the student to substitute technique for substance. At the same time it has the extraordinary power to assist and enhance creative work.

Diversity and Multiple Perspectives

Bennington seeks to teach a respect and enthusiasm for diversity—not only in the usual ways of race, gender, culture, and tradition—but especially in the diverse ways of understanding and changing the world. In particular, the College seeks to educate multiple perspectives and capacities—multiple ways of defining, expressing, thinking, knowing.

Beginnings

In most schools, students who are assessed by the college to be without minimal proficiencies—usually limited to numeracy and writing—are required to take marginalized, remedial courses. The predictable outcome is that students do as little as possible to meet the requirement, failing to engage or enjoy the subject, in the end foregoing the chance for a sense of genuine understanding and accomplishment. At Bennington, another approach is proposed. Core Faculty would teach a cluster of "Beginnings" courses, each emphasizing a mode of human understanding and expression. Music, mathematics, words, pictures, and movement, for example, are equally vital ways of knowing; they are biologically rooted, they are educable, and each can be a threshold for another. All entering students will be required to consider at least one of these courses. In this case, however, the student—not the College—will decide which one and the prerequisite for admission will be to demonstrate dread rather than confidence, a presumption of insufficiency rather than of talent. The result of a Beginnings course should be (1) to provide, at the beginning of each student's college education, a universal, low-risk experience of honest

self-assessment; (2) to seed the idea within each student that almost any arena of learning is within his or her reach; (3) to demonstrate at the outset an unprejudiced but discerning regard for diverse forms of knowing; and (4) to depart from prevailing notions of remedial education in order to recast deficiencies or disabilities (often *learned* disabilities) into propositions consistent with our convictions about capacities and learning.

The issues addressed by the Beginnings concept are of great importance at all levels of education. Hence, the development of such a cluster of courses might also provide a promising opportunity to work with master teachers from primary and secondary education and to join forces with several of the country's most important educational reformers.

Diverse Cultures: A Faculty Seminar

The shared values so essential to America's promise are the very qualities of enlightened interdependence on which global citizenship depends. Bennington is unequivocally committed to introducing each of its students to the terms of citizenship both in a pluralistic democracy and in the global village.

The complexities of introducing students to diverse cultures at Bennington are compounded by recalling that this College is a profoundly American institution. Founded in 1932 on explicitly Deweyan propositions, it became a home for Martha Graham, the creator of twentieth century American dance; for the abstract expressionist painters and sculptors who defined twentieth century American art; for Howard Nemerov, among the first poet laureates of the United States. Those roots make the achievement of an international perspective all the more challenging.

For philosophic and practical reasons, the College has concluded that it must tackle the curricular challenge of educating its students in perspectives and cultures other than their own in an unusual way. This goal is not especially well met by an obligatory introductory requirement in multicultural studies, largely disconnected from the remainder of a student's undergraduate programs. Also inadequate is the area studies approach, in which experts reside in quasi-academic departments, inviting a necessarily small number of students to join them while leaving a vast majority untouched by their enthusiasms. Moreover, even if it wanted to, a smaller institution cannot afford to cover the world with neatly packaged area studies. Instead it needs to consolidate its resources, selecting a focus that has intrinsic breadth with boundless hand-holds or doorways for students (and faculty) of every disposition. Although this strategy is necessitated by size, it is also conditioned by pedagogic preference.

A new approach is to establish a seminar of, by, and for the faculty that focuses on other cultures in relation to our own. China, for example, by virtue of its maturity, size, artistic and scientific virtuosity, and importance to the future, would be a particularly apt initial choice. Because an important goal of examining an unfamiliar culture is to reflect and refract a more familiar one, the seminar would vigorously attempt to juxtapose new knowledge and understandings of another culture with that of the American experience.

The hope for these seminars would be that undergraduate classrooms, studios, and laboratories might become forums and outlets for seminar-generated insights and interests. The aim would be twofold: to enhance the understanding of unfamiliar cultures and to embody the ideal of collegiality and joint enterprise. If successful, the Faculty Seminar could become a regular program for the initial exploration of new themes, enhancing the faculty's capacity to exploit differences for shared purposes through collaboration and invention.

Alternative Formats

The Board is forwarding two Symposium suggestions of alternative educational formats for Core Faculty deliberation and elaboration.

The Seven-Day College

Typically, colleges and universities shut down by Thursday afternoon, impoverishing residential and educational life. The Seven-Day College proposal suggests an alternative. In addition to increasing the flexibility of class scheduling for all faculty and students, the extension of classroom time to weekends would provide opportunities for bringing people to the College who are unavailable during the week. While some colleges open campus classrooms on the weekends for nontraditional students taught by traditional faculty, the idea at Bennington would be to open classrooms on the weekends for *traditional* students taught by *nontraditional* faculty.

The Four-Year Master's Degree

For educational reasons, the Board of Trustees opposes the current trend to cut college costs by qualitatively reducing the length of an undergraduate education to three years. At the same time it acknowledges that the caliber of some theses, projects, and related work that culminate a Bennington student's education is equivalent to work normally accorded a graduate degree. *In the presence of clear evidence that their work deserves such a*

degree, the College might consider seeking approval from the state education department to award a Master's degree at the end of four years to such students. This would not be a program students could apply for; rather, it would be available on the recommendation of the faculty as an option only after the completion of the student's work and would rest on the judgment of outside examiners, distinguished in their fields.

Graduate Education

Many observers see Bennington as a model for graduate, not undergraduate, education, believing it is premature for undergraduates to assume responsibility for the design of their own educations. The College clearly does not concur. The Bennington model is a compelling alternative not only to traditional undergraduate institutions, but also to conventional Master's and doctoral programs, so often unnecessarily confining.

The College has several Master's programs in the visual and performing arts that will continue to expand. In addition, its Postbaccalaureate Program in Premedical & Allied Health Sciences for students preparing to apply to medical or allied health sciences graduate schools has become an acknowledged leader in an increasingly competitive arena. All of these programs require full-time residency on campus for two years.

The M.A./M.F.A. program in Writing and Literature, launched in 1993, uses a very different model. While it is also a two-year program, residency on campus is limited to around-the-clock sessions of ten days every six months, interspersed by off-campus tutorials with distinguished writer-mentors. Each faculty member supervises the work of five students. The strengths of the students and faculty in this program and the quality of the work already produced have convincingly established the premise that flexibility in residency requirements need not compromise quality. While obviously not suitable for all graduate study, the mix of low-residency and high seriousness has other applications. It is especially useful to adults at different junctures of their lives who want to undertake sustained, independent graduate work with the assistance of faculty mentors and with periodic opportunities to share that work with fellow students.

Yet another model exists in the current five-year B.A./M.S. program in education offered in collaboration with the Bank Street College of Education in New York. In this model, Bennington students spend three years on campus in Vermont, one year at Bank Street in Manhattan, and return for their final year to Bennington.

Emerging Graduate Program Ideas

Each of these models suggests opportunities for elaboration and expansion. For example, there is a growing need for writers who can make scientific ideas accessible to lay audiences. With the help of the science faculty, the introduction of writing could be an interesting expansion of the graduate writing program. Another possibility is to develop programs for teaching teachers that capitalize on Bennington's distinctive pedagogy. In the case of collaborative programs with other institutions, a five-year B.S./M.A. program might be considered in architecture, design, and engineering.

To coordinate these programs, the College will establish the Bennington Institute of Graduate Studies. In addition to those programs with preestablished formats, applications will be considered from individuals who propose a plan for independent study using the resources of the College. When responding to these and other possibilities for graduate education, the range of interesting residency models is important to keep in mind. Combined with a commitment to the highest standards, it expands significantly the possible impact Bennington could have in an area of education that has great potential for innovation and growth.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Symposium has enabled the Board of Trustees to establish criteria for immediate changes in existing programs, as well as to set priorities for new programs. The Board will ask the Core Faculty to elaborate and test these new program ideas against certain goals related to Bennington's mission:

- ◆ Each student's Bennington education should grapple with the challenge of nurturing conditions of freedom within a framework of order.
- ◆ Each Bennington student should learn first-hand the generative power of multiple ways of knowing the world.
- ◆ Each student should leave Bennington with his or her passions intact, honed and fortified by an exacting education.

CONCLUSION

Three forces compelled the Trustees to undertake the Symposium as a preamble to institutional reform. The first was the growing conviction that a sixty-year-old liberal arts college whose *raison d'être* is to be an innovating center of liberal learning must create processes that continually invite intellectual, pedagogic risk-taking and that locate authority and responsibility *together* in decentralized places. The second was a growing recognition that certain conditions of higher education in America at odds with Bennington's mission need to be openly challenged. The third was the deepening financial reality that Bennington will not be supported by applicants, foundations, or alumni and friends unless it is unequivocal in its pursuit of creative excellence.

Changes of the kind proposed in this report would be inconceivable at most institutions today. Bennington can undertake them for several reasons. Critically important is that there are many women and men on campus who exemplify the ideals the College wishes to institutionalize. By example, these people are a source of immeasurable inspiration and courage and they deserve to work in an environment that celebrates their values and accomplishments. Also crucial is that Bennington alumni expect their College to thrive on the leading edge. In contrast, most colleges would be wary of opening a process of this kind to graduates, accurately predicting that their alumni would be among the most resistant to all but nostalgic change. Another factor is certainly Bennington's small size. The chance to concentrate on problems and projects that require integration and whole treatments is impractical in large universities, as is the opportunity to recover a sense of college-wide collaboration among pioneering individuals with a lively interest in the development of their own and each other's work.

At the same time, small size can be a liability. There is no such thing as a drop in the bucket. While small changes in conditions can have big consequences for good, they can also be deleterious. A few more dollars, ten more strong students, or one person's initiative can have a galvanizing, multiplier effect. But a modest decline in dollars or enrollment, an increase in financial aid need, or individual complacency cannot, in a small college, be absorbed by scale and density. Everything matters.

The human and financial costs of a transition of the kind that Bennington requires are not trivial. The Board of Trustees has made difficult choices in what it believes to be principled and thoughtful ways; but in a small institution especially, every change has an intensely human face.

If the costs and risks are substantial, our belief is that the rewards are unbounded. So it is with both solemnity and enthusiasm that Bennington College embarks on the next phase of its life, as T.S. Eliot says, into another intensity.

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