

Bennington College

Self-Study

for

**The New England Association
of Schools and Colleges**

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PREFACE

From the time of NEAS&C's focused visit to Bennington in 1996, we have known that a full review would come in 1999. Since we are now in the fifth year following the College's restructuring, it has been particularly instructive to undertake the self-study process.

More than a year ago, President Coleman appointed her special assistant and the associate dean of the College to co-chair the steering committee to prepare for the self study and visit. The co-chairs attended a workshop given by NEAS&C for institutions preparing for an evaluation and another NEAS&C workshop on assessment.

The president also invited representatives from across the College community to sit on the self-study committee. The full committee consists of:

Joan Goodrich, special assistant to the president; Wendy Hirsch, associate dean of the College; Rebecca Godwin, writer; Larry Lee, vice president for finance and administration; Bill Reichblum, dean of the College; Paul Renzi, director of student life and campus services; Andrea Reynolds, assistant director of admissions; Terry Creach, faculty member in dance; Mansour Farhang, faculty member in international relations; Amy Williams, faculty member in music; Allison Ryan '98, trustee; and students Mimi Bradley '00, Garin Marschall '00, and Jenna White '00.

The committee was charged with designing a process for writing the self study that would engage the entire community. To that end, the committee met regularly throughout the year as a group, as well as in smaller configurations. The committee met with Amy Lezberg from NEAS&C shortly before her retirement to discuss general questions about the process of evaluation. In May 1999 the committee met with the chair of the visiting team, Dr. Frances Volkmann, to discuss the upcoming visit.

Several people outside of the committee were asked to draft portions of the self study as appropriate. After the committee reviewed the first draft, it was placed in the library for the entire community to review and make suggestions for revision. An e-mail address was established to facilitate the process. Faculty members were regularly

informed of the progress of the committee at faculty meetings, and the entire campus received two newsletters published by the committee: one in the spring, which contained information about the standards, the committee membership, the time line for the evaluation, and the process for writing the self study; and one in the fall, with an update and details of the team visit. The board of trustees were informed of the progress of the committee throughout the year at quarterly meetings. Alumni were notified in the alumni magazine, and the greater community was notified via press release.

An early draft of the self study was sent to NEAS&C in May. Upon receiving a detailed response from associate director of the Commission Peggy Maki in June, members of the committee worked on clarifications and additions. The co-chairs met with Dr. Volkmann in mid-July to discuss the visit. Revisions to the self study were completed by August 15 in preparation for printing and distribution to the Commission and to members of the visiting team.

Many, many members of the Bennington College community devoted time, energy, and intelligence to this self study; for their generous contribution, we thank them.

OVERVIEW

At the center of the last decade of Bennington's history is a redesign of the College, led by the trustees. In response to intense financial pressure on the institution, the College undertook a process of sustained and complex self-examination described in the Symposium report, issued in 1994. Bennington has continued to build on that process to initiate a major restructuring of the College that is still underway.

The Symposium report began as follows: "Six 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."

The road that led to the publication of the Symposium report and the ensuing restructuring of the College had two converging paths: educational and financial. The College, founded as an experiment in education in the 1930s, had instituted a number of radical and compelling ideas, many of which were subsequently adapted in American higher education. It became clear by the early 1990s, however, that for Bennington to attract and retain the necessary quality and quantity of students in an increasingly competitive market, the College would have to regain an order of academic excellence that was genuinely innovative and distinctive. On the fiscal side, a combination of declining enrollment and growing financial aid needs forced the College to engage in a fundamental, institution-wide reassessment.

Through the Symposium process, the board did not intend to create a mechanical blueprint for the College's operations, but rather "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."

Among the fundamental principles outlined in the Symposium report were the assertions that a Bennington education would emphasize the teacher-apprentice model and reemphasize the teacher as practitioner; that ways to expand the relationship between the College and the world would be aggressively pursued; and that the College would reincorporate an institutional preference for experiment.

Organizational changes called for in the report were, in addition to the reinstitution of a faculty of teacher-practitioners, the retention of a full range of disciplines but an abandonment of fixed academic divisions; a reformulation of faculty responsibilities and authority into faculty program groups composed of teachers with converging interests; the substitution of individualized contracts in place of Bennington's presumptive-tenure system; the call for

collaborations and partnerships as a means to effect program development; and the institution of short-term, intensive residencies to increase the flexibility and breadth of the curriculum.

The report suggested administrative restructuring to consolidate functions and bolster admissions efforts and student retention. It also mandated that governance structures “exploring ideas for new ways of linking and distributing obligations and authority” be developed by faculty, students, and staff.

The report contained suggestions for changes to existing academic programs, especially in language, literature, and music. Technology would be emphasized as a tool for collaborative creativity, and computer center resources used to integrate multimedia applications throughout the curriculum. As part of a commitment to strengthen students’ understanding of their interdependence with and responsibility toward the world, it proposed institution-wide efforts in ecology and public service. As part of a commitment to work in areas that cross disciplines, the report proposed developing a program in brain/mind/behavior studies.

Through these organizational and programmatic changes, the board of trustees aimed to bring the structures and processes of the College in line with our mission and purposes. Specific goals of the restructuring process included increasing enrollment during the ensuing five years to a minimum of 600. Another primary impetus was the College’s commitment, as both a practical and ethical consideration, to limit the cost of a Bennington education. Over the ensuing five years, the report stated a specific goal of reducing tuition in 1994 dollars by 10 percent.

Insofar as the purpose of the redesign of Bennington was to reanimate educational life and regain our competitive position in the marketplace of liberal arts education, we have succeeded. Reconfiguring the academic structure, establishing a faculty contract system, pioneering programs in language learning and teacher education—these radical changes have reaffirmed Bennington on the path the founders of the College envisioned.

The Commission has raised specific questions—both prior to the 1996 focused visit and in a March 15, 1999, letter to President Coleman—about Bennington’s academic life, faculty, student life, enrollment, financial equilibrium, and infrastructure. As for academic life, enhancing the quality of the undergraduate academic experience was central to every aspect of the redesign. Evidence of the extent to which the College has achieved this goal is demonstrated throughout this self study. In terms of faculty issues, the greater flexibility allowed by faculty contracts combined with multi-disciplinary initiatives and an emphasis on the teacher as practitioner have guided the appointments of new faculty. Current faculty is of sufficient range, size, and quality to carry out the institution’s redefined educational objectives. Faculty members have always been active participants in the making of educational policy at Bennington, and although committee structures have been recast, that role continues. The trustees, the dean of the

College, and the president are also actively involved in educational policy. These issues are discussed in Standards Two through Five of the report.

Improving the quality of student life, another primary concern expressed by the Commission, was as central to the purposes of the redesign as enhancing the quality of educational life—indeed, we view them as inseparable. Nowhere are the transformations at Bennington more dramatic than in this area. Standard Six focuses on these issues.

These concerns—academic integrity, faculty quality and participation in governance, and the quality of student life—are at the center of the focused self study prepared for NEAS&C in 1996. That report is available in the workroom.

The goal of achieving financial equilibrium, which requires an enrollment of approximately 600 students, has yet to be accomplished, but we are well on our way. Fundraising to support the College while enrollment rebuilds has been extraordinarily successful. In the five years since the issuing of the Symposium report, Bennington has raised \$30 million in cash and pledges from individuals and foundations, compared with a total of \$16 million received in the five years immediately preceding the restructuring. This represents an increase in philanthropy to Bennington of more than 70 percent. The College is now at a point where very modest increases in entering classes and maintenance of recent retention rates will enable us to achieve a financial equilibrium in the next three years, so that revenues from major gifts can be allocated to special programmatic and capital needs rather than to support operations. Finally, we have kept our promise to reduce the real cost of tuition by 10 percent. A letter detailing other concerns vis-à-vis financial matters, responding to concerns specified in the Commission's letter of March 15, 1999, is available in the workroom.

Even more important than fundraising to the turn-around at Bennington is the quality of the admissions effort. Bennington had to increase significantly the numbers of entering students without compromising quality if the long-term success of the College were to be assured. So far the admissions effort has accomplished those goals. The number of entering students has more than doubled since the low point of 1995, with no diminishing of quality. Attrition has also markedly improved since that time. Admissions is discussed in Standard Four.

At the center of this overall achievement is the quality of ideas that define a Bennington education. It is those ideas that attracted the financial support from foundations and individuals, which will carry us through the transition to full enrollment; and it is those ideas that have enabled the College to recover from the drastic enrollment declines of the early 1990s and to decrease attrition rates significantly.

The extent to which the particulars of the redesign have been successfully implemented has varied, as this study shows. Efforts in ecology and service, though substantial, have yet to achieve the full potential envisioned in the Symposium report; the emphasis on multimedia

technology has been transformed by the emerging educational capacities of the Internet. Some initiatives have exceeded the goals articulated in the report; others have been developed that were not foreseen at all.

Another measure of our progress is the renewal and expansion of our physical plant. In the last two years Bennington has significantly increased the allocation for routine maintenance and spent an additional \$560,000 on existing housing; we are also in the process of expanding recreational facilities. The College is now at the initial stages of a new building project that, in the short term, involves the construction of additional student housing and the initial phases of major renovation on the nerve center of the College—the Commons building. Eventually the plan involves the completion of the renovation of Commons, the construction of a recreation center, and a doubling of existing library space.

Much has been accomplished in these last five years; much remains to be done. The trustees have recently initiated a five-year assessment of the Symposium, which will help ensure continuing self-scrutiny and long-term planning, while also assuring that the crisis that initiated the restructuring process does not recur.

STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND PURPOSES

DESCRIPTION

From its earliest beginnings—well before the groundbreaking ceremonies in 1931—Bennington College has had a clear sense of mission and purposes. The men and women who brought the College into being aimed to found a school, as noted in a 1929 prospectus, that would emphasize “the individual student and her developing interests,” learning “by activity and living,” a community life designed to “break down artificial barriers between teacher and student and between curriculum and extracurriculum,” and “a conscious elasticity in educational plans.”

As befits an institution whose founders believed strongly in progressive education, the principle of learning by practice underlies every major feature of a Bennington education: the close working relationship between student and teacher, the insistence on self-determination, the commitment to learning across the disciplines, and the field work term, which gives students work experience and connects them to the greater community. Also key to Bennington’s philosophy is the conviction that a college education should not merely provide preparation for graduate school or a career, but should be an experience valuable in itself and the model for a lifelong habit of learning.

In the 1930s the College’s first president, Robert Devore Leigh, developed a statement describing Bennington’s guiding ideals. This statement—which was read at the first commencement in 1936 and has been part of every commencement since—continues to express the College’s mission and purposes.

Commencement Statement

Bennington 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 a meaningful education, and an

essential aspect of the nurture of free citizens, dedicated to civilized values and capable of creative and constructive membership in modern society.

In 1993, when Bennington set out on a year-long process of determining ways to reanimate our mission and restore our distinction as a pioneering institution, this statement served as an essential sounding board against which new ideas were examined. The Symposium report, adopted and issued in June 1994 by the Bennington College board of trustees and available in the workroom, reaffirmed the College's mission and proposed a number of new ideas "designed to bring the College's programs and resources more in line *with its original philosophy and aims* [emphasis added]." The report's First Principles, along with the commencement statement, comprise the College's mission statement.

First Principles

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 commencement statement has long been a prominent part of the Bennington culture. In addition to its integral role in commencement ceremonies, the statement is printed in the *Stories* viewbook and the curriculum sampler sent to prospective students. The text of these two recruitment pieces further delineates the College's mission, philosophy, and purposes, both in specific language and through general content. The Symposium report's First Principles are also included in the student handbook. All of these publications are available in the workroom.

Together with the Symposium report, these statements continue to guide the actions of the board of trustees, the administration, faculty, and students, as well as to provide a basis for ongoing institutional evaluation, internal and external.

APPRAISAL

When Bennington undertook the process of radical reevaluation in 1993 and subsequent restructuring in 1994, it was with a spirit of reaffirming the College's deepest principles. Among the more than 600 suggestions and ideas that came in from every constituency of the College community during that assessment process, not a single one challenged the founding principles of the College—though nearly all conceded that Bennington had, over time, strayed from them. The question before the College then was not, what should our mission and purposes be, but rather, how do we change and improve our methods of realizing the mission and purposes our constituencies continue to recognize as valid.

The aim is that Bennington's mission and purposes guide not only curricular and other academic programming, but also underlie academic structures, governance practices, extracurricular activities—indeed, the

community culture as a whole. In a number of areas that aim is closer to realization because of the changes resulting from the restructuring; in others, the College remains engaged in efforts to improve the correlation between aim and result.

Certainly one of the clearest successes generated by the restructuring is the Regional Center for Languages and Cultures, which exemplifies principles of learning by doing and extends the College's reach far beyond our community. The new B.A./M.A.T. program holds similar promise. Student and faculty governance procedures continue to evolve, flexible faculty contracts are working well, and faculty advising and student planning processes have undergone significant refinements that strengthen their utility as tools for designing individual educational experiences. On the other hand, the concept of the faculty program group as an alternative to divisional structure has been less than successful, though interesting and powerful collaborations among disciplines have proliferated.

In its First Principles, the Symposium report asserted that Bennington "should be conscientiously progressive, innovative, and pioneering." That charge set in motion the need for continual reassessment and subsequent action, where necessary. Indeed, as evidenced by this self study, the College has closely monitored progress towards achieving our mission and goals in the ensuing five years.

PROJECTION

As the renewal process begins its fifth year, it is particularly appropriate to take stock of the process of bringing the College's programs and resources more in line with our pedagogy and mission. The work of the last decade has served to make clearer than ever the enduring power of that philosophy. It has also made evident the need for continuous scrutiny of the extent to which that philosophy informs and guides the actualities of the College. We intend to continue that process; complacency in this regard is not an option.

Toward that end, the board of trustees launched in spring 1999 a formal, systematic review of Symposium initiatives that is expected to continue over the next few years. As part of that review, we anticipate that the trustees will set up periodic reevaluations of the College's mission and purposes and of the resources we use in our efforts to realize them.

STANDARD TWO: PLANNING AND EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

Strategic and organizational planning activities at the institutional level are a collaborative effort of the offices of president, vice president for finance and administration, dean of the College, development, and admissions. Board members also actively engage in many aspects of Bennington's planning efforts. The board or the executive committee of the board reviews all major planning issues and recommendations.

The 1994 Symposium report continues to provide the fundamental strategic planning framework for the College. Planning at Bennington is undertaken by senior management as an ongoing process and is treated as a primary part of its responsibilities. Much of the planning activity takes place in conjunction with the preparation of the annual budget (covered in Standard Nine and below) and the quarterly meetings of the trustees. During budget preparation, long-term goals are reevaluated, along with projections for annual revenues and expenditures.

Budgetary Planning

Evaluation and planning take place on an annual basis, culminating in the spring with the establishment of the upcoming year's budget. This process is ultimately a collaboration between the vice president of finance and administration, the dean of the College, the director of development, and the director of admissions. After a thorough analysis of the current year's budget and completion of projections for the following year, the proposed budget is presented to the president and then to the board of trustees for final approval. This process is completed by June of each academic year.

Budgeting of faculty salaries is initiated by the dean and the program directors, and is approved by the vice president of finance and administration and the president. Non-personnel academic costs are worked out with program directors, individual faculty members as appropriate, and the academic policies committee (APC). The APC is composed of six elected faculty members, an

elected faculty chair, the president, vice president for administration and finance, and the dean. See Standard Three for a full description of the APC.

Institutional Academic Planning

Weekly meetings of the APC are a primary context for the development of academic policy, both short- and long-term. The dean also meets regularly with faculty—singly and in groups—program directors, student leaders, and staff to assure that long-term thinking about academic matters is broad-based and ongoing. The president and the dean focus on long-term academic policy reviews and projections in preparation for trustee meetings. They also meet weekly to address matters of immediate academic concern. For further details on academic planning, see Standard Four.

Through the regular curriculum, tutorials, and intensive residencies, the College provides both a consistent foundation of academic programs and special opportunities for expanding students' academic experience. These opportunities, which emerge from all constituencies of the College, contribute substantially to Bennington's educational dynamism.

In the academic year 1997-98, the College created a new framework for faculty communication, analysis, planning, and evaluation. All faculty were appointed to committees in areas identified by the APC and the faculty generally as needing attention. These committees met weekly. The chairs of these committees constituted a steering committee to oversee the process. The steering committee also met weekly. Areas covered included:

- student academic planning
- experiment and innovation (E&I) program
- first-year academic initiatives
- learning and tutoring
- design and technology
- performances from the academic programs in music and drama
- integration of mathematics into the liberal arts curriculum
- community issues

The outcome of this work included a radical redesign of student academic planning, which has been adopted by the College; the establishment of policy and procedures for the experiment and innovation program, with the first grants awarded; a new academic program for students in their first term; and guidelines for and a redistribution of academic budgeting for performance work arising from specific academic initiatives. The committees no longer meet,

but their work continues as necessary in other standing committees or through individual offices.

Throughout the calendar year, the dean of the College meets weekly with the president, vice president, associate dean, director of student life, faculty groups and individuals, and student leaders to address academic issues, short- and long-term.

Individual Academic Planning and Evaluation

We have just completed the first year of our new academic planning process for each student's program of study, a detailed description of which is in Standard Four. Throughout the year we received feedback through faculty and student meetings; in addition, students answered a questionnaire responding to questions about the new process. From these responses, it seems clear that the new planning process is solid. Students in academic trouble have been identified earlier and given the appropriate direction; students who were thriving have been given the opportunity to focus their ideas and to receive guidance earlier.

For students, the reshaped planning process has given more direction and more accountability to their process of formal written reflection. Faculty members and the dean's office review each stage of the planning process for each student. Formal assessments are made in the first, second, third, and fifth terms; others are assigned as necessary. Outcomes of the assessment process might indicate a necessary shift in course work, a greater attention to performance, a reconfiguration of a thesis project, and so on. One specific outcome of the new planning process is that, having required all first-term students to write a reflective essay, we saw that a number of international students lacked refined writing skills. In response, we initiated a required diagnostic essay for international students to take during orientation, which helps with earlier identification of students who need writing assistance..

In assessing individual academic progress we consider students' narrative evaluations and grades, minutes from plan meetings with faculty, information from individual faculty members, and advisor reports. First-year students are followed particularly closely. In addition to the above resources, a committee of administrators (associate dean, director of student life and campus services, director of admissions and the first year, and the director of psychological services) meets regularly to monitor the progress of first-year

students. Information gleaned from these meetings helps to inform the individual supervision of each student as well as to shape ongoing planning for the first year.

Institutional Research

In the summer of 1995 an institutional research committee was formed to coordinate and review the data collected by various College offices. Composed of representatives from the key data-collecting offices (admissions, development, the dean's office), the director of academic computing (who is also a statistician), and co-chaired by the associate dean of the College and the special assistant to the president, the committee's first task was to interview every organizational entity to determine exactly which information was collected and where overlaps and gaps existed. The committee brought in an outside consultant to assist in mapping out a strategy for an effective approach to institutional research in a context where a separate office for institutional research is not feasible.

The committee developed a three-phased plan to create survey instruments as needed, collect and analyze data, and implement integrated systems for the management of the information (see workroom for time line). The areas of primary focus were and continue to be attrition/retention, alumni/recent graduate activities, scheduling of reports, and standardization of College statistics. A focus on the latter resulted in the 1997 publication of Bennington-at-a-Glance, distributed to each administrative office for easy reference; a copy is available in the workroom.

After extensive revision by the committee, a form and a protocol for students who decide to leave or withdraw from the College is now in place. Regular tracking of student leaves and withdrawals is conducted by the dean's office and is also monitored as part of the regular enrollment planning function of the vice president's office. Another project initiated and implemented by the committee was regular "general satisfaction" surveys of students and faculty; the first two surveys were developed, conducted, and evaluated by the committee, and it was decided that a more comprehensive survey that compared the College's results with those of other institutions would be useful. Last spring, a standardized form, developed by Noel-Levitz, was given to all students. We await the compilation, and expect that a copy will be available in the workroom.

APPRAISAL

In the 1994 NEAS&C self study, we noted that effective planning and long-term thinking had not been Bennington's strong suit, and that the College tended "to trust more spontaneous, *ad hoc* responses to problems, to be more reactive than proactive." In the aftermath of the restructuring, slowly and surely, that tendency has begun to shift. Plans are underway in the development area that project out over 10- and even 20-year periods, for a program that involves building alumni support over the long haul. The admissions effort increasingly aims to institute strategies to change Bennington's position sufficiently so that we can routinely expect a larger pool of applicants at the outset of each admissions cycle. We are squarely assessing and developing long-term strategies to meet challenges in the areas of fiscal planning, technology needs, and facilities requirements. And as the office of the dean of the College continues to evolve, it becomes even more effective at planning and evaluation for all aspects of academic life.

Though Bennington has made progress, we still need to devise ways to institutionalize planning and evaluation, making them part of regular office routines throughout the College.

PROJECTION

As Bennington's fortunes stabilize, we are increasingly able to abandon the reactive tendencies and habits of crisis management. That allows for deliberate, long-term planning to become routine. The biggest remaining obstacle is the need to create and develop effective and sophisticated capacities and habits of data collection. This will be significantly advanced by the current institution-wide upgrading of technology support systems. In the absence of an office of institutional research, the need for maximum collaboration and coordination among administrative offices is an ongoing challenge.

Academic planning for individual students will continue to be scrutinized over the next three years as we evaluate the new four-year planning process. Faculty will continue to discuss relevant aspects of the new system in full

faculty meetings; a smaller group of faculty and administrators intends to focus on the academic plan process in the 1999-2000 academic year as well.

As noted in the Overview section of this report, the trustees of the College have recently initiated a five-year review of the Symposium. We expect that intense evaluation to facilitate the kind of long-term planning that will assure the continued success of this College.

**STANDARD THREE:
ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE**

DESCRIPTION

Board of Trustees

The structure of the board and obligations of the trustees are set out in the by-laws of the Bennington College Corporation, available in the workroom. Article XI, sections 1 and 2 of the by-laws specifies in detail the indemnification and liability coverage of the trustees by the College.

Responsibility for the conduct of all College affairs, and especially for the academic integrity and fiscal soundness of the institution, rests with the board of trustees. The board's obligations include appointment of the president, regular reviews of presidential performance, fiscal oversight, hiring and termination of faculty, prescription of admissions and graduation requirements, conferring of degrees, setting of tuition and fees, and review of the academic program and standards. The trustees also review and approve any other policies with substantial financial, contractual, or legal implications. As ultimate custodians of the institution, trustees are fully apprised of all aspects of College management and life so that they can exercise their responsibility by making informed and timely decisions.

Membership. The board of trustees consists of not fewer than 15 nor more than 35 voting members. Currently there are 23 voting members. The president of the College is an *ex officio* member of the board, and the vice president of finance and administration is treasurer, *ex officio*. Each trustee serves a four-year term (with the exception of recent graduate trustees, who serve two-year terms) and is, at the end of that term, eligible for re-election. With the exception of officers of the board and chairs of standing committees, no voting member may serve for more than a total of 20 years, not more than 12 of which may be consecutive. Officers of the board are elected annually by the trustees. Members of the board do not receive compensation for their service as trustees.

Committees. The five standing committees of the board are the executive committee; the educational policy, admissions, community life, and facilities committee; the development committee; the budget and finance

committee; and the trusteeship committee. The executive committee of the board is made up of the officers of the board and committee chairs; the committee on trusteeship nominates individuals for new or continuing board membership and recommendations are made to the full board of trustees. The board establishes *ad hoc* committees for specific purposes as necessary to address issues such as presidential review and investment. Two *ad hoc* committees are currently at work: one to review alumni structures and the other to oversee several proposed construction projects. A full board directory and committee membership list are in the workroom.

Meeting schedule. The board meets four times annually: in October, January, April, and June. The January meeting is held in New York City. Board committees meet independently prior to each board meeting, and the full board of trustees meets in executive and general sessions. Faculty and students meet with the trustees as needed.

Administration

President. The president, selected by the board of trustees, is an *ex officio* member of the board and all of its committees and, as chief executive and administrative officer of the College, is charged with the authority and responsibility to take any lawful action for the welfare and health of the institution. The president is the source of information between the board and the College, and she is responsible for budgetary management, institutional advancement (including development, external relations, and student recruitment), planning and evaluation, and administrative organization. The president makes recommendations to the board on certain administrative appointments, employment policies for faculty and staff, faculty contracts, and academic matters such as standards and curriculum.

The president is regularly accessible for individual meetings with members of all constituencies of the College. In addition, she has weekly open hours for student conferences, presides over faculty meetings, is a member of the academic policy committee, and meets regularly with staff. She often teaches and occasionally serves as academic advisor.

Senior staff. In managing the day-to-day life of the College, the president is assisted by the senior staff, the top administrative tier, composed of the special assistant to the president, the vice president for finance and administration, the dean of the College, the associate dean of the College, the

director of student life and campus services, the director of development, and the director of admissions and the first year. Also reporting to the president are the director of the Regional Center for Languages and Cultures, the director of the B.A./M.A.T. program, and the director of psychological services.

Several changes have occurred in the administrative structure of the College since 1994. The most important was the creation of the position of dean of the College, appointed by the president. This position replaces the positions of dean of faculty and dean of studies, formerly appointed by the president from a slate of faculty nominees presented by the faculty. Other shifts in senior administration reflect a redistribution of functions designed to improve accountability and oversight for the administration of the College.

The organizational structure of the College is represented in the chart in the appendix to this report. Descriptions of the responsibilities of each senior staff member may be found in the 1999-2000 student handbook.

Regular meetings of the senior staff, subsets of the senior staff and other staff as needed, administrative departmental meetings, and full-College staff meetings, held several times a year, help maintain administrative communication and coordination.

Faculty

Faculty governance. The dean of the College is the chief academic officer and works closely with the president and the faculty to oversee and coordinate academic life. The faculty is responsible for recommendations to the dean about aspects of the curriculum and academic programs, faculty appointments, faculty reviews, and academic budgeting. Faculty members carry out these activities through their participation in meetings of related disciplines, the academic policies committee, regular faculty meetings, and serving on standing and *ad hoc* committees.

Standing committees. Standing committees provide opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to contribute opinions and expertise and to make recommendations prior to the adoption of policy decisions. Subcommittees and *ad hoc* committees are formed to deal with new issues as they emerge. All of the following committees were created following the Symposium in 1994. Additional information on several of these committees is available in the workbook.

• **Academic policies committee.** At the heart of faculty governance is the academic policies committee (APC). It is authorized to recommend new academic initiatives, review the curriculum on a regular basis, approve courses, and assign credit hours. APC is composed of an elected faculty chair who serves for a one-year term, the dean of the College, the president, vice president for finance and administration, and six elected faculty members, who serve for staggered three-year terms. Three members of the APC serve on the budget subcommittee and are periodically apprised of budgetary matters by the vice president for finance and administration. This subcommittee's role has been limited primarily to reviewing and participating in decisions regarding academic capital budget items. Three members serve on the curriculum subcommittee and are responsible for making recommendations to the full APC regarding the curriculum. The APC reports on its work and brings recommendations and discussion items to the full faculty at monthly faculty meetings during each term.

• **Faculty review committee.** The primary responsibility of the faculty review committee (FRC) is to make recommendations concerning reviewable members of the faculty to the dean of the College, who thereafter makes recommendations to the president. Faculty reappointments are made by the board of trustees upon the recommendation of the president. In addition, the FRC meets regularly with the dean and the president to discuss faculty personnel policy. The FRC consists of five members of the faculty elected by the faculty for staggered terms of three years, with elected alternates serving for one year. A chair, elected from the committee, serves for two years. A detailed description of FRC procedures is available in the workroom.

• **Faculty grievance committee.** The faculty grievance committee (FGC) is charged with responding to alleged violations of faculty review procedures and alleged violations of the College's principles of academic freedom. Three elected faculty members serve on the FGC for staggered terms of three years. Two elected alternates also serve three-year terms. The FGC has the authority to ask the FRC to rehear a faculty review or to make recommendations to the dean regarding complaints of alleged violation of the principles of academic freedom.

• **Community council.** The community council provides a forum for individuals and organizations within the College to discuss and make recommendations on campus issues. The council does not consider matters

where existing College bodies have jurisdiction and encourages the active use of established channels of governance. It serves in an advisory capacity to the president and meets at least once a month. This committee is composed of 15 voting members (five members of the staff or administration, five faculty members, and five students), a non-voting moderator, and a non-voting secretary.

• **Land and building use committee.** This committee is responsible for setting policies governing the enhancement of the campus, the protection of the environment, and the accessibility of the campus. Any projects involving the installation of materials or the alteration of land or in any building on College land must be approved by this committee. Members, appointed by the president, are the vice president for finance and administration; the directors of maintenance, security, and the College farm; a faculty member in environmental studies and one in architecture; a student involved in environmental studies; and the special assistant to the president, who currently serves as chair.

• **Campus life committee.** This committee helps formulate policies and makes decisions or recommendations to the director of student life and campus services. Each year, five faculty or staff members and five students are elected to serve on this committee, which is chaired by the director of student life.

One important standing committee that includes faculty and predates the Symposium is the judicial committee, which hears cases referred to it by the director of student life that involve infractions by students of the College's tenets of student behavior or its policy on alcohol and drugs. It may impose sanctions ranging from a reprimand to suspension or expulsion. The three student members and four alternates are elected by the student body (serving one-year terms), and the three members and two alternates of the faculty, staff, or administration (serving renewable one-year terms) are appointed by the dean of the College. The chair is elected by the student body. Working in conjunction with the judicial committee is the administrative review committee, which handles special cases and appeals. Its members are the vice president for finance and administration, the dean or associate dean of the College, and a faculty or staff member appointed by the president.

Other appointive faculty committees, described in workroom documents, include the sexual harassment hearing committee and advisors, and

committees on research using human subjects, experiment and innovation program, scholarship, library, field work term, and the computer center and technology.

Staff

Staff association. This voluntary organization of administrative staff employees meets monthly to hear speakers on various College topics and to discuss staff issues. Its officers and other representatives meet periodically with a representative of the senior staff of the College to ensure the maintenance of good employee relations and, as necessary, to discuss issues affecting employees. The staff handbook, revised in summer 1999, provides information to new and continuing staff about College employment policies, procedures, and benefits.

Students

House chairs. Self-governance is at the core of residence life, and house chairs play a pivotal role in providing leadership and assistance to students residing in their house communities. Until 1998, house chairs were elected by the members of their houses each year. In an effort to improve the participation, training, and accountability of house chairs, the system of selection was revised last year, with each house providing two nominees for each house chair position. Selection is then made by a committee composed of a student, a faculty member, the current house chair, and a staff member from the office of student life. House chairs are now compensated for their work; the student life staff conducts regular performance reviews.

In addition to the committees listed above, students serve as members of the following student government organizations, described in Standard Six of this report and in the 1999-2000 student handbook, also available in the workroom: student council, the student educational policy committee, the campus activities board, and the talking heads committee.

Alumni

Alumni relations activities and structures, coordinated by the office of development and communications, were recently reviewed by an *ad hoc* committee of the board of trustees, as noted above.

APPRAISAL

Board of Trustees

The trustees have included themselves in the processes of review and redesign that have guided the College as a whole. They have just completed a review of alumni relations that has resulted in changes in the composition of the board and has altered the ways in which the College works with alumni in such crucial areas as fundraising and admissions. The board also continues to lead the College in the process of ongoing review and assessment by initiating a five-year audit of the report issued by the trustees in 1994.

Administration

The integration of the positions of dean of faculty and dean of studies into a single office led by a dean and an associate dean of the College has strengthened the administration of academic life. Although some may have preferred the more decentralized system that preceded it, this change has been supported by the majority of faculty and students. This change, in combination with the work of the academic policy committee, provides more effective oversight of curricular issues and a centralizing of non-personnel budgetary matters that assures ongoing emphasis on the overall perspective of the College's needs in allocating limited resources. The change has also given stability and continuity to the leadership of academic affairs; the deans were replaced every three years under the previous system. It has the additional advantage of locating academic leadership at the senior administrative level elsewhere than in the president's office.

A more recent change that has increased significantly the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration is the integrating of a wide variety of student services into the office of student life and campus services. Also, the deliberate integration of the first-year experience into the admissions office has provided continuity for new students by maintaining a relationship with admissions staff and has helped us respond earlier to new students who experience difficulties in adjusting.

The special pressures on the admissions office to build enrollment and on the development office to fund the transition period to full enrollment remain. So far these pressures have been handled remarkably well, but not without a continual eye to making changes when necessary or responding to

changes as they occur. The close working relationship among members of the senior staff plays a critical role in enabling the College to deal with such changes without undue disruption or loss of morale.

Faculty

The 1996 report by a NEAS&C visiting team focused on the issue of faculty governance. Their entire report is available in the workroom, but a passage is worth including here because it provides an invaluable outside perspective in an area where objectivity is especially difficult to achieve:

The academic policies committee, a faculty-elected committee with administrative presence, has been in existence for 1-1/2 years. It is a dynamic group that tackles issues such as shaping the curriculum to ensure cohesion and innovation, providing structure to the faculty program groups, and generally creating order without undermining the freedom and creativity that have reigned supreme on the Bennington campus. The work of this leadership committee, together with that of the faculty review committee, composed entirely of faculty members and charged with making recommendations concerning faculty reappointment, seems to be instrumental in the elimination of faculty distrust, and in instilling the institution with a new sense of optimism, collegiality, and cooperation.

The challenges facing a tiny residential institution when making difficult personnel decisions remain, and negative recommendations from the faculty review committee, the dean, or the president continue to pose difficulties. Nonetheless, the College has weathered a number of such decisions with a degree of maturity and equanimity that is in marked contrast to its previous history in this regard.

Efforts to create a culture of innovation have had more mixed success, which is, in part, a function of limited fiscal resources. Much remains to be done.

Students

Bennington's strong commitment to self-governance for students in both academic and non-academic life means greater opportunity and greater dangers in the efforts to create an effective, humane, and vital community. It

provides a special intensity to the ongoing need to distinguish freedom from license and individual responsibility from arrogance.

In that effort, we have seen a marked diminishing of the we/they mentality between students and administrators; an ongoing transformation of self-governance, most particularly in the organization of house chairs, to allow for a greater degree of responsibility and accountability; and a growing willingness of students to assume the obligations that come with being active participants in the judicial processes of the College.

PROJECTION

It is crucial that the College continue to focus attention on issues concerning educational integrity as well as those concerning the management of financial and physical resources. A primary vehicle for this in the coming years is to review systematically the extent to which Symposium initiatives have been implemented and the extent to which they have accomplished their objectives. The April 1999 meeting of the trustees delineated this evaluative project, one that is expected to continue during the coming year. All members of the faculty have been invited to submit their views in writing to the trustees. A memo from the chair of the educational policy committee of the trustees initiating this process is available in the workroom, as is the letter from the chair to the faculty inviting their participation. This process will go on during the coming academic year and culminate in a report from the board to the community at its completion.

Given the recent reconfiguration of virtually all governance structures, we do not foresee other major changes in the near term. Emphasis will be placed instead on designing strategies for evaluating effectively these new designs. The faculty and the dean are in continual discussion about the effectiveness of the faculty review committee in maintaining faculty excellence, and the faculty and administration are paying growing attention to increasing the effectiveness of the academic policy committee. These are matters of regular review at Bennington. To what extent reevaluations should take a more formal and official cast is something the College needs to address carefully. The effort to achieve an order of stability in structures of governance is as important a goal as maintaining the habit of scrutiny.

In addition, we need to design structures and strategies that encourage faculty-led efforts to devise new clusters of curricular initiatives that expand, and even transform, traditional ways of thinking about undergraduate education. The president, the dean, and members of the academic policy and faculty review committees will address this issue in meetings throughout the 1999-2000 academic year.

STANDARD FOUR: PROGRAMS AND INSTRUCTION

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

Virtually all of Bennington's academic activity remains devoted to a four-year undergraduate education leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree. The requirements for the Bachelor's degree—its policies and procedures, its curriculum, admissions policies, instructional methods, and modes of evaluation—are clearly articulated in a range of publications and are continually scrutinized by the faculty and administration. The section that follows on undergraduate education provides details about its substance and design.

Since Bennington's founding in 1932, graduate degree programs have been added in the visual and performing arts, in writing, in teaching, and in interdisciplinary liberal arts education. These programs lead to a Master of Fine Arts, a Master's in teaching, and a Master's in liberal studies. They have grown out of those areas where Bennington's strengths are most clearly established and acknowledged—the visual and performing arts, writing, and a long-term practice of providing options to students working across disciplines. The most recent addition—a combined five-year program leading to a Master's in teaching—capitalizes on Bennington's distinctive pedagogy and our commitment to a continuum between practice and teaching. The M.A.T. program uses the resources of the entire faculty, rather than a separate faculty in education.

In addition, Bennington offers a postbaccalaureate program that provides the premedical curriculum for college graduates seeking access to medical or veterinary school. This program builds on Bennington's strong offerings in the biological sciences in addition to the standard physics, mathematics, and chemistry premedical curriculum.

With the exception of the M.F.A. in writing, these programs have a total of 19 students, whose needs can readily be met with existing faculty and physical resources. The M.F.A. in writing enrolls 98 students, has its own faculty, and is entirely self-funded.

In addition to periodic reviews of the viability of these programs by the dean, the vice president for finance and administration, and the president, they are periodically reviewed by appropriate faculty to assure that their educational purposes and potential are realized. Bennington has no continuing education programs or off-campus programs that offer college credit. See the section on graduate education below for more details.

As indicated in this self study, all of the College's programs are consistent with our mission and purposes. All were initiated to extend and strengthen the resources of the College, both financial and intellectual, and are continually evaluated to assure that they are properly supported without draining resources from the central mission of the College. The objectives and requirements for each program are specified and published.

Special, non-degree programs at Bennington—the July Program and the Early Childhood Center (ECC)—have long histories at the College. The July Program is for high school students and offers a microcosm of the College curriculum. The ECC is for children aged two to six. It provides teaching opportunities to undergraduate and graduate students and early education for children of faculty, staff, and the larger community. Both of these programs have their own directors and faculty. The directors report to the senior staff of the College. The July Program is self-funding; the ECC is modestly subsidized by the College. Both are compatible with the College's mission and purposes.

Undergraduate Programs

A Bennington education is a self-directed pursuit of learning that emphasizes first-hand experience. As defined each year at commencement, its purpose is “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.” Programs and procedures are intended to further that aim.

The overall shape of a Bennington education is fundamentally hand-crafted. Instead of a set of generalized prerequisites and electives, each student designs and navigates an individually tailored program of education, the coherence and substance of which is ensured by an ongoing “conversation” among individual students, faculty, and staff in a carefully structured design that begins during the admissions process and continues through the

completion of the senior year. This conversation, called the plan process, is at the heart of a Bennington education.

While each student's plan is different, all academic programs take place in a common educational frame as outlined in the 1994 Symposium report:

...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.

Since the plan procedures assure coherence and a mixture of breadth and depth, and in effect, define the values that inform a Bennington education, these procedures are worth presenting in some detail. The plan process was drafted in 1997 by a committee appointed by the president, consisting of the president, the dean of the College, and six members of the faculty from a range of disciplines. After discussion and approval by the faculty as a whole, the revised plan was instituted during the 1998-99 academic year. Provisions were made to enable then-current juniors and seniors to continue under the former procedures.

The Planning Process

The process begins while seeking admission to the College. Admissions has designed its proceedings around the idea of a conversation. That conversation culminates in an intensive interview that is a substantive, focused discussion of the applicants' thinking about their education. Interviewers are trained specifically for these interviews. The admissions application essay questions reinforce this invitation to applicants to reflect, both retrospectively and prospectively, on their education. Ongoing discussions among the admissions staff aim to refine the effectiveness of their efforts to communicate the dynamism and character of a Bennington education.

First year. During their first year at Bennington, all students are encouraged to explore as many areas of study as possible. Students are expected to delve into subjects they have never studied before, to learn new

ways of thinking, creating, and challenging themselves. Students are urged to visit classes other than those they are registered in to discover more concretely the range of possibilities available to them; throughout their time at Bennington, students are similarly encouraged to visit classes.

Near the end of fall term, students write a first-term essay, reflecting upon their transition to College and providing initial thoughts about how their first-term experience has begun to shape their education at Bennington. A copy of the essay is given to the student's advisor, who evaluates and discusses the essay with the student, and notifies the dean's office of compliance. The dean's office, in cooperation with the office of admissions and the first year, evaluates the essays. As is the case with succeeding stages of the educational plan, the essay becomes part of the student's academic file.

In the middle of spring term, after developing their ideas with their advisor and other faculty members, students submit a preliminary plan to the dean's office. Three faculty members (not limited to the student's field/s of interest) review the plan and meet with the student. The faculty panel gives feedback on the plan and submits minutes of the meeting to the dean's office and the faculty advisor; the dean's office formally reviews the plan and minutes.

Second year. In the fall term, the student's advisor recommends three faculty members to work with the student in developing the educational plan for the middle two years. This is normally a time to focus interests, develop connections, and pursue mastery. Near the end of term, students submit the third-term plan to their advisor, the three faculty members, and the dean's office. A meeting is then scheduled with the faculty panel and the advisor to determine a supervisory plan for the middle two years. Supervision may include specific times for the entire committee or portions of the committee to meet over the course of the second and third years; it may include the submission of periodic written reports to the committee; it may recommend specific additional faculty to engage in the process; or it may determine that something altogether different is required. The supervisory plan is given to the dean's office for formal review.

In the spring term, students continue pursuing the intentions outlined in their third-term plans, meeting any obligations proscribed by the supervisory plan.

Third year. In the fall term, students continue the work of their plan for the middle years. As in the preceding term, they may be required to meet certain obligations specified by their committee.

In the spring term, the work may culminate in a performance, a thesis, a collection of writing, an exhibit, some combination of these possibilities, or something entirely different. The project, if there is a particular one, will have been previously described and approved by the faculty committee in the third-term plan. While the intention is that a student's work will gain a particular focus during these middle years, this process does not preclude further development of the work in the final year.

During the spring term, students also work with their advisor and appropriate faculty members (possibly the full faculty committee) to develop their plan for the final year. All senior proposals are submitted to the dean's office and forwarded to the senior review panel, composed of six faculty members and the dean, for review. The panel recommends supervision for the final year. On occasion, the panel may choose to meet with students to clarify the intentions of proposals. The intent of the proposal is to outline the work of the final year, with a particular emphasis on opening up the work to the larger community and exploring new areas of inquiry.

Fourth year. During the fall and spring terms of the final year, students pursue the work described in their senior proposals and meet any obligations determined by the senior review panel.

In the spring term, students submit a senior essay that reflects upon the development of their educational design. This essay is given to the advisor and the dean's office for review.

General guidelines. To implement this process effectively, two days are devoted each term to formal discussions between faculty and students that focus on the plan process, in addition to continuous advising.

In approving the revised planning process, it was agreed that these procedures are subject to ongoing review to assure that they do, in fact, accomplish their aims. A guide to the plan process, which includes all of these procedures and additional materials concerning this process, is sent to all enrolled students.

Advising

Advising is an essential feature for providing students with the oversight and counsel they need to pursue their education productively and responsibly. Every student is assigned a faculty advisor whom they meet with on a regular basis throughout their four years. During the first year, these meetings occur once every two weeks, at a minimum. Advisors can be changed upon request by the student or the advisor.

The advisor oversees the unfolding of the plan process and emphasizes the values that define a Bennington education overall, beyond those appropriate to particular areas of study. Mid-term and end-of-term course evaluations are forwarded to advisors, enabling them to stay apprised continually by faculty colleagues of the work of their advisees. All new faculty have an extended orientation to the responsibilities of advising at the beginning of their first term.

General Education

While Bennington lacks any set of particular course requirements per se in meeting its commitment to general education, it embraces fully the ideal of the broadly educated person, making those values prominent not only at the outset of a liberal education, but at its completion. Beyond requiring breadth for a substantial portion of the undergraduate experience (approximately 50 percent), the placement of that requirement in the senior as well as the freshman year profoundly reinforces its meaning and value.

Writing is an essential part of every student's education, regardless of the area of concentration, because of its prominent role throughout the plan process. A capacity for quantitative reasoning plays a critical role in a range of disciplines at Bennington—increasingly so as computer technology becomes a major tool in the visual and performing arts. Advisors working one-on-one with their advisees are also particularly well positioned to urge the importance of those courses that are most likely to expand a student's world. Bennington's method has the further advantage of enabling the student to participate actively and seriously in the process of choosing such courses.

Student Assessment

Assessment of a student's performance in each class at Bennington takes the form of narrative evaluations written by faculty members at the middle and end of each term. In these evaluations, instructors assess the student's academic

strengths and weaknesses, identify areas for further efforts, and describe overall progress. At the close of the end-of-term narrative evaluation, the student's work for the term is rated "passing," "not passing," or "marginal pass." These narrative evaluations comprise students' transcripts. They are, as indicated earlier, circulated to advisors as well as to students. The College now provides students the option of requesting letter grades in addition to narrative evaluations. This option is not available to first-year students.

Often, as a result of information gained from individual narrative evaluations, conversations with faculty members, minutes from plan meetings, or plan reviews, students are given specific requirements to complete. For example, one student may need to take a writing composition course, a math course, or an art course in a different medium; another might need to reshape a junior or senior project to allow for study abroad or the acquisition of a critical skill. As the design of a student's plan becomes more focused, specific curricular needs also become clear. The dean's office works closely with advisors to ensure that the academic progress of students is adequately monitored on an ongoing basis. First-year students are supervised particularly closely by all faculty members, the advisors, and the first-year committee of administrators.

In addition to evaluations for each course, student work is continually evaluated in the context of the plan process as outlined above. That process involves the preparation in writing of a number of documents that are reviewed by advisors, faculty panels, and the dean's office, as well as substantial independent projects in various media that are reviewed by appropriate faculty.

Curriculum

While academic divisions have been eliminated at Bennington, disciplines have not. The College continues to provide a curriculum with a high degree of intellectual focus, offering courses in most disciplines in the traditional liberal arts and the visual and performing arts. More specifically, courses are offered in anthropology, architecture, biology, ceramics, chemistry, computer design, dance, design, drama, graphic design, history, literature, mathematics, music, painting, philosophy, photography, physics, printmaking, psychology, sculpture, and video. Students are able to work in depth in any of these areas. In addition to these traditional disciplinary areas, the curriculum includes a regional program in languages and cultures; a new College-wide initiative in teaching; musical instrument lessons; and courses and programs developing out of faculty collaborations that extend across the established disciplines.

Upperclassmen may request individual or group tutorials on topics outside of the regular curriculum. These more individualized learning experiences extend Bennington's curricular breadth and depth and offer students additional opportunities to design their own education. Tutorials also sometimes serve as springboards for new courses.

The Regional Center for Languages and Cultures (RCLC) has enabled the College to increase the number of languages taught on campus, while simultaneously making sophisticated language instruction available to students and teachers in pre-college settings throughout the region. The focus of the center is language fluency, and its primary strategy is to connect language and culture. Teachers in the center have highly developed skills in the pedagogy of language instruction and relevant technologies and an in-depth grasp of the culture of the language. Approximately 30 percent of Bennington students are enrolled in a foreign language course, with most continuing beyond the elementary level. Japanese, Italian, and Chinese are now regularly taught, in addition to French, German, and Spanish. The emphasis on culture has enhanced the impact of the center on the curriculum generally, as the study of foreign languages connects to a range of courses throughout the curriculum—in music, history, and literature, for example. The RCLC also provides programs in public schools and three private schools in the region, with more than 140 children enrolled in its programs. Technology at many levels is a primary dimension of this program. Increasingly, the attention of the center is focused on the education of foreign language teachers located throughout the state of Vermont. Materials describing the RCLC are included in the workroom.

The B.A./M.A.T. is a five-year program. It has been certified by the State Education Department of Vermont to license teachers of early childhood, elementary, and high school students. At the core of the program is the same Bennington education that is required of all other Bennington undergraduates. In addition, these students practice-teach for an entire year under the supervision of master teachers and participate in a number of specially designed seminars. This program has its own director, who reports directly to the president. Students may enter this program as undergraduates or after completing an undergraduate degree. Admission to the program is handled through the office of admissions and the first year.

Curricular Review

The entire curriculum is reviewed every term by the curriculum subcommittee of the academic policies committee. This review includes all courses—those that are repeated as well as those that are offered for the first time. The student educational policy committee (SEPC) is also charged with reviewing the quality of each course and of its teaching. Each class has an SEPC representative who is responsible for overseeing the process of course evaluation, which takes place at mid-term and at the end of term. The mid-term evaluation is particularly important, because it provides a formal opportunity for students collectively to discuss their perspective on a course with the faculty member teaching it while the course is still in session, when adjustments can be made if deemed appropriate by the faculty member. More information on SEPC is provided in Standard Six.

The curriculum for the following academic year is published in its entirety early in the spring term. Prospective students receive a viewbook that contains a representative sampling of courses that have been taught over the most recent four-year period. This information is updated when necessary at the beginning of each term.

Field Work Term

Field Work Term (FWT) consists of a seven-week term in January and February of each year, when students take paid or volunteer jobs and internships in their career fields or areas of interest, or conduct independent studies with faculty sponsorship. Students are required to work a minimum of 30 hours per week for the period. Completion of one FWT period for each year of study is a requirement for graduation.

At the completion of each FWT, the employer/academic sponsor evaluates the student's work and the student completes a field notebook and a summary paper describing and evaluating the experience. The papers of first- and second-year students are read by the FWT director, who makes the determination of a pass/fail grade. Papers for third- and fourth-year students are read and evaluated by the student's faculty advisor, and the evaluation becomes a permanent part of each student's academic record. A grants committee, composed of faculty and administrative representatives with the director serving as chair, administers grants totaling \$4,500 that allow a

number of students to take non-paying FWT internships or otherwise help defray costs.

Students engage actively and directly in the placement process, assisted by the student placement/FWT office. Annual mailings generate approximately 1,000 internship listings in different career fields. In addition, all students receive a copy of the FWT guide, which outlines program requirements, resources, services, and a time line for acquiring the job. A peer-advisor career assistance program, initiated in 1996, provides resume reviews, weekly workshops, and evening and weekend office hours. Bennington alumni support the FWT program by providing job and housing opportunities.

The office also assists students in making career decisions and developing job search strategies and techniques and maintains job listings for permanent, part-time, and summer jobs. A mentor program with approximately 650 alumni participants serves as a network for current students.

Students can now register their FWT positions online, link to internship and job search sites, request lists of mentors, and obtain general FWT or career information. Employers can list FWT, summer, and full-time opportunities online. FWT publications are available in the workroom.

Study Abroad

Bennington no longer operates study-abroad programs because of insufficient volume and the range of alternative external options that are available. Students who wish to study abroad must get approval from the appropriate faculty and the dean's office.

Academic Standing

The dean's office and the office of admissions and the first year monitor student progress as well. At the end of each term, the dean's office conducts a formal review of the evaluations of every student. These offices have also initiated an early assessment system for academically troubled and first-year students, so that problems can be attended to promptly. Students at any stage of their studies whose work is determined by the dean's office to be unsatisfactory may be placed on academic probation. Rules governing academic probation are in the student handbook, available in the workroom, as are rules regarding academic progress. Failure to meet the College's

expectations in regard to quality of work and timely progress toward a degree can result in a student's being required to withdraw from the College.

Requirements for Graduation

Although Bennington does not demand that students take a prescribed set of courses, the College does maintain certain general criteria that graduates must meet:

- 1) Students must take at least 16 credits each term, unless granted permission to do otherwise, for a total of 128 credits. The minimum number of credits allowed for graduation is 120.
- 2) Students must successfully complete a field work term each full year in attendance at the College.
- 3) Students must submit and have approved the various written documents that comprise the planning process, each stage of which must be completed in a timely manner.

Scholarship and Research

The recommitment to the importance of the active practitioner as teacher was one of the defining elements of the redesign of the College. A distinguishing mark of the Bennington pedagogy is the continuum in the classroom between the practicing life and the teaching life. Practice necessarily varies among disciplines, but it is consistently defined in terms of engaging the world and doing so in a way that has a broader reach than a dialogue that is limited to professional colleagues.

Professional work must also be work that is subject to review and evaluation from peers outside the Bennington community. This criteria of practice differs from traditional scholarship and research in contemporary higher education, which is defined largely by the work of academic colleagues. This emphasis on practice makes professional work, rather than the acquisition of advanced academic degrees, the primary criteria in appointing and renewing faculty. In some areas where advanced degrees are especially relevant in achieving a certain order of practice (for example, the sciences), they are to be found in abundance; in areas where they are not necessary for an active practice (for example, writers of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction), they are less in evidence.

The College is keenly aware of the demands made on faculty to be active practitioners. A modest budget is allocated to support these activities. More important, the inclusion of the field work term in the academic calendar is designed to maximize opportunities for faculty—and students—to pursue their work outside the classroom for sustained periods. Leave of absence and sabbatical policies further enable faculty to pursue work that requires their absence from the campus.

There are no constraints on the academic freedom of faculty or students in the pursuit of their work.

Instruction

In a College where the student/faculty ratio is seven-to-one and where all faculty members teach all levels of classes, teachers and students come to know each other well. Faculty members deliver curriculum at Bennington in small, seminar-style classes and tutorials, often one-on-one.

To evaluate the effectiveness of instruction, students meet twice each term with their class SEPC representative (and without the teacher) to discuss course content, the instructor's response to student work, and other class-related topics. Following the first discussion, the SEPC representative meets with the instructor, who then discusses the evaluation with the class as a whole. At the end of term, each student completes a questionnaire assessing the course and instructor. Class SEPC representatives summarize the evaluations. The instructor receives the summary, in addition to individual evaluations at the discretion of each student. SEPC representatives meet with students working in particular disciplines at least once a term to discuss problems with curriculum or instruction. If there are concerns, SEPC representatives present them to the APC. This interactive and ongoing review process between students and faculty is a primary formal means for ensuring teaching effectiveness.

Faculty also evaluate the teaching of their colleagues as part of the review procedure, primarily by visiting classes.

Bennington's system of academic advising is discussed in the description and appraisal sections of undergraduate degree programs.

Graduate Programs

The College has four Master's programs and one postbaccalaureate program. With the exception of the M.F.A. in writing, all are full-residency programs. The

residency programs are small by design and will likely remain that way. Again, with the exception of the writing program, they are administered through the dean's office. Requirements for graduation vary for each program and are included in each program's brochure. The M.F.A. program in visual and performing arts is currently developing a graduate handbook that will spell out its requirements clearly.

The Master of Arts in Liberal Studies. This relatively new two-year program was begun to meet the needs of returning students already holding an undergraduate degree who want to pursue graduate study in an interdisciplinary framework. Students develop their work in the context of a plan, as on the undergraduate level. Courses are a combination of regular undergraduate courses with an additional work component and individual tutorials in advanced study. A substantial thesis is required. Only one or two students are enrolled in this program in any given year.

The Master of Arts in Teaching. Students may pursue this degree while still undergraduates by applying after they have begun their studies at Bennington to the joint B.A./M.A.T. program, or after having received a B.A. from another college. For further information, see the undergraduate programs section above; also, a brochure describing this program is available in the workroom.

Admissions and Retention

The College seeks applicants of diverse backgrounds capable of making intelligent and responsible use of the academic and personal freedom that Bennington offers. Students are valued who are able to present a well-balanced program of study in high school and whose interview and essays, as well as transcripts, recommendations, and test scores, indicate self-motivation and a willingness to take themselves seriously as thinkers, artists, and scholars.

As indicated in the undergraduate programs section, the admissions process itself is designed to initiate the kind of thinking about the undergraduate experience that is at the heart of the Bennington experience. Materials used by the admissions office are available in the workroom.

Applicants must submit standard written materials (the secondary school transcript, two teacher recommendations, SAT or ACT scores) and two essays. Students are also encouraged to submit samples of work or evidence of special talents or accomplishments. Interviews are an important part of the evaluation process.

The admissions committee assesses application materials to obtain a composite picture of the applicant. They look for signs of curiosity, creativity, academic discipline, and the personal qualities of integrity, maturity, respect, and concern for others.

For transfer applicants, the process additionally requires transcripts from all postsecondary institutions and recommendations from at least two recent faculty members. The dean's office assigns a transfer student status as a first-, second-, or third-year student upon admission.

Students wishing to enter Bennington before completing high school may apply for early admission and should have the strong support of family and school. Bennington offers early decision and early action plans to give candidates early notification of the admissions committee's decision. Students may defer acceptance to Bennington for up to a year.

Bennington does not give credit for advanced placement, prior learning, or independent study outside the aegis of the College. It may, however, allow a qualified student to enter an intermediate level class. These requests are evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the faculty member concerned.

Bennington has not wavered in its commitment to a need-blind admissions policy, enabling the College to maintain its historic commitment to provide access to students with diverse demographic profiles. The addition of a special scholarship program for community college graduates nominated for admission to the recently initiated B.A./M.A.T. program has further extended this commitment. These scholarships are sufficient to enable community college graduates to attend Bennington for approximately the equivalent of the cost to attend a four-year public institution. We also anticipate that the instituting of this program and its scholarship support will enable Bennington to recruit more effectively a racially diverse population. Eleven percent of Bennington's students are international, making it proportionately one of the more diverse populations in this regard.

In the case of students with special needs, admissions alerts the dean's office and suggests specific counseling or housing assignments. Prior to each term, the admissions staff meets with the dean's office and the student life staff to discuss the new class and to identify and devise support for students with special needs. Their progress is tracked by staff members throughout the year.

Since 1994, when the admissions office became the office of admissions and the first year, we have placed a greater emphasis on the first-year

experience. Efforts to develop curriculum specific to first-year students have met with varying success, but none sufficient to become institutionalized. Currently we are considering developing a range of mentoring relationships using upperclassmen as well as advisors, rather than focusing on a particular set of courses specifically geared to first-year students.

Attention to the first year has also included regular interviews with entering students by the director of the office of admissions and the first year and additional thoughtfulness in the selection of first-year faculty advisors. All of these efforts have contributed to a significant decline in net attrition over the last five years, from 23.4 percent to a projected 15.5 percent for the fall 1998 class. Changes to the plan process, described above, also enable faculty and staff to identify students who are in trouble much earlier. Efforts continue to determine as fully as possible why students leave the College for reasons other than inadequate academic performance.

With the exception of the M.F.A. in writing program, the office of admissions and the first year handles application materials for the College's graduate and postbaccalaureate programs. Admissions decisions are made in consultation with the dean's office and the faculty. The M.F.A. in writing manages its own admissions program, which is administered by the associate director of the program and relies heavily on samples of applicants' written work, along with recommendations and transcripts from previous academic work.

APPRAISAL

Undergraduate Degree Programs

The academic strengths of the College remain inseparable from its originating ideas: students taking responsibility for designing their education; the central role of academic advising; the immersion of students from the outset in the center of the faculty's working life; and the continual pursuit and elaborations of interrelationships between life inside the classroom and life in the world, i.e., the field work term, emphasis on the practitioner-teacher, teaching and learning as performing arts.

The abandonment of the departmental structure—called divisions at Bennington—was in part designed to provide a flexibility that would enable students to pursue more freely programs of study that do not fit departmental

categories. It has succeeded admirably in that regard. The problems that remain are in finding alternate ways to accomplish some of the tasks of curricular oversight that the divisional structure addressed, or at least appeared to address. It had been expected that the faculty would reconfigure itself into a variety of collaborative groupings including, but not limited to, those sharing a discipline or closely related disciplines. We anticipated that in so doing the faculty would shape the clustering of curricular offerings into something more coherent than a collection of individual courses. We also presumed that such collaborative efforts in designing curricula would provide a longer-term perspective.

These collaborative efforts have happened to some extent, in some cases more than in others, but not sufficiently overall to satisfy the faculty. The shift to a more centralized operation of the dean's office also requires devising more effective ways of facilitating this effort, since it requires both centralized *and* decentralized planning.

Advising

One of the primary goals of revising the plan process was to return advising to a central and more academically substantive activity. The more textured, detailed, and demanding responsibilities of students and faculty in the revised planning process strengthen the role of the advisor and advising in managing the process. At the moment it is too soon to evaluate the long-term effects of the plan process redesign on advising.

Significant disparities exist inevitably in the talents that both faculty and students bring to this aspect of the educational process. Strategies for compensating for this circumstance have not been wholly successful, although we have increasingly acknowledged these differences in assigning advisors, particularly to first-year students. Such administrative responses are necessary, but they are necessarily limited in effectiveness. Here, as elsewhere, it is crucial that faculty have the opportunity to work and think together about these matters in ways that develop a deeper working consensus about the purposes and demands of advising.

Student Assessment

The use of narrative evaluations has probably spared Bennington some of the distortions that grade inflation has exacted in the past decades, but not

The Master of Arts in liberal studies is a ready example of a program that has offered the best of the undergraduate experience on a more advanced level, requiring no additional resources. The combined Bachelor's/Master's of Arts in teaching, our newest program, does the same, expanding from the heart of the College to create a powerful education in teaching precisely by limiting the number of courses dedicated to that program and by providing strong administrative leadership.

The low-residency M.F.A. in writing program provides yet another model—one that has worked very effectively. This program takes maximum advantage of Bennington's extraordinary history in attracting some of this century's most renowned writers to its faculty to teach literature and writing. Continuing that tradition at a graduate level has attracted a highly distinguished faculty. Using the low-residency model developed successfully at Warren Wilson College, Bennington has attracted a growing number of students who use the campus and its resources at previously under-utilized times. The result is an economically viable program that enhances the College's reputation.

A review of the postbaccalaureate program has resulted in adjustments that respond to the needs of students embarking on the ambitious process of acquiring a medical or veterinary education. The program can now be completed in a year and a summer, instead of requiring two full years. Materials describing the program have been revised and revitalized, and the admissions process has become more focused.

Admissions and Retention

The admissions effort at Bennington has had the enormous and critical task of reversing a downward enrollment spiral that began in the early 1990s and bottomed out in 1995, with an entering class of 78 students. This office was also charged with achieving the enrollment turnaround while simultaneously maintaining the quality of entering students. Both challenges have been met. The entering class for 1998 was 158 students. Average combined SAT scores have ranged in the high 1100s throughout the last five years. Average GPA is now at 3.5 and the percentage of students in the top tenth of their class is now at 27 percent. If Bennington is to achieve its goal of an undergraduate enrollment of more than 600, this upward trajectory will need to continue for

entirely. For a long time, many students have felt that academic standards are uneven and in some cases, not sufficiently demanding, and that faculty evaluations generally are not tough enough. This year the leadership of the student educational policy committee met with the academic policy committee to articulate those concerns. This greater willingness to discuss such issues by both students and faculty is a positive change for Bennington.

General Education

The revised plan process has already had an impact on confronting issues of breadth. The opportunities this process provides for faculty to address the programs of students as they unfold are equally important. We expect such ongoing, concrete experiences, and the conversations that take place among colleagues on a case-by-case basis, to generate the detailed working consensus about the importance of general education that is necessary for it to take hold most effectively.

The dependence on intensive advising and the workings of the plan process are not foolproof methods for achieving the ideals of general education, any more than are other strategies that seek to push people to extend their reach. But used well, this combination of planning and advisement has the capacity to transform students' sense of possibilities.

Scholarship and Research

Requiring active practice along with teaching excellence has served the College extremely well in providing a faculty that, though necessarily limited in size, can generate a high-powered educational experience.

Graduate and Special Programs

The M.F.A. in the visual and performing arts has been a fairly steady importer of talent to the College. The burden on the faculty is minimal, the drain on resources is small, and the graduate students generally bring a strong presence to campus, providing services through assistantships that add to rather than distract from the undergraduate program. Students pursuing the M.F.A. have requested clearer guidelines for the development of their programs and the evaluation of their work; the faculty is working with the dean's office to provide this.

the next three years, finally leveling out at an annual entering class of 180 to 190 students.

The admissions office has taken maximum advantage of the reanimation of Bennington and designed an admissions effort that captures the intellectual excitement of the College. Materials are available for review in the workroom.

PROJECTION

Undergraduate Degree Programs

The intention of Bennington's redesign was, in large measure, to create structures that are more compatible with the purposes and mission of the College. As we continue to discover, the creation of such structures is even more complex than envisioned. It takes time, not only because of the tendency towards inertia—doing things in the same ways we have previously done them—but also because of the difficulty of knowing in advance what will work and what will not, and of understanding the nature of the tradeoffs involved in choosing one way over another.

Having addressed some of the more immediate concerns, such as revising the plan process, building new governance structures, and acclimating ourselves to the absence of old structures, the College can now attend more fully to the challenge of developing the kinds of faculty collaborations—formal and informal—and administrative support that will assure a dynamic, responsive, and responsible curriculum.

On related fronts, the College is likely to continue to intensify and expand its orientation of new faculty to methods of evaluation, the details of the plan process, the kinds of criteria that should be considered in developing curricula, and the kinds of options available for collaboration with colleagues—and to extend those formal discussions to include continuing faculty as well.

Scholarship and Research

Efforts to recruit faculty who bring the same passion and capacity to their teaching as to their practice need to be sustained. The search for individuals who combine these strengths is anything but routine, requiring determination and energy, particularly in areas outside the visual and performing arts and literature, where Bennington's reputation is especially distinguished.

Admissions and Retention

The admissions effort will continue to require a great deal of focus, discipline, imagination, and the combined efforts of students and faculty as well as admissions staff if it is to maintain this upward trajectory. Very effective leadership will be required to increase the numbers of applications and at the same time continue to provide the kind of careful attention to each prospective student that has been the hallmark of past success.

Efforts to contain attrition also must continue unabated. In the current year we are focusing on the use of upperclassmen as mentors to entering students, in addition to concentrating on faculty advising. The amendments to the plan process, described earlier in this standard, give more substance to the advising relationship during the first year. We anticipate that this adjustment will further positively affect retention.

STANDARD FIVE: FACULTY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The heart of the Bennington faculty's responsibilities in teaching, advising, and professionalism is especially well defined in a study prepared by the academic deans in 1994.

Teachers. *At Bennington, teaching methods are generally expected to be collegial and participatory. In exchange for relative freedom to teach what interests them most, teachers assume an obligation to try to engage each student (including those least experienced) in their broader intellectual and artistic enthusiasm. Through individual attention, teachers are expected to enable each student to exceed his or her grasp and to encourage and emphasize scholarly, scientific, and artistic self-expression so that learning is understood as an active and creative undertaking. At the same time, faculty expectations of each student must be high and the standards of each discipline must be met. Finally, faculty members are themselves expected to thrive in the classroom. In some expressible ways, teaching should contribute to their professional lives as writers, scientists, choreographers, composers, scholars, artists, and makers of theater.*

Professionals. *Bennington's pedagogy requires faculty members to bring a lively and developing professional life to the campus and the classroom. The specific mode of such a life depends entirely on the faculty member and his or her discipline, but it must be explicitly demonstrated, shared with colleagues and students, and evaluated by outside peers. Students and colleagues should be actively invited into some aspects of that life—as apprentices, reviewers, observers, or visitors.*

Academic Advisors. *Trustees believe that regular, serious academic advising is fundamental to the Bennington program for each and every student. Its purposes are several and include the oversight of an education of the highest quality each student can attain. A further and critical consequence of the commitment to advising is that no Bennington student should leave the College without a mature, well-examined understanding of the choices, values, and principles that have shaped his or her education.*

Faculty Size, Qualifications, and Responsibilities

Bennington's faculty, which has no rank, is composed of 42 full-time (this includes faculty members who teach full-time for one term annually) and approximately eight part-time instructors. In addition, teachers in the Regional Center for Languages and Cultures number 10; five instructors offer practice in specific techniques; and the College employs 12 instrumentalists.

Given the range of Bennington's curriculum and its emphasis on the teacher as practitioner, academic degrees are often not a critical consideration. In specific areas, such as the natural and physical sciences, mathematics, and the social sciences (including history and philosophy), all but one faculty member has a doctorate, and that person has a law degree. In an area such as literature, on the other hand, taught by faculty who are themselves writers, the critical credential is the quality of their published work and ongoing activity as writers. In this regard Bennington's faculty in literature is exemplary.

While abandoning the divisional organization, Bennington has maintained commitment to teaching the traditional liberal arts disciplines and the disciplines comprising the visual and performing arts. They include sciences and mathematics, literature, languages, history, philosophy, anthropology, media studies, brain/mind/behavior, psychology, architecture, music, voice, visual arts, dance, childhood studies, photography, video, design, computer studies, drama, and community, culture, and environment. Faculty members within most disciplines meet regularly to discuss the curriculum. This commitment to the disciplines does not, however, exhaust curricular options. Faculty are encouraged to work across disciplinary lines within particular courses and in designing clusters of courses. A new area—the education of prospective teachers—involves the entire faculty. Budgetary and personnel matters that have traditionally been the prerogative of departments are worked out in the context of the College as a whole.

Full-time faculty members are responsible for teaching a minimum of two courses per term, leading tutorials, acting as advisors to entering and advanced students, serving as faculty advisors to advanced students working on projects, and participating in rehearsals, performances, lectures, and special events as appropriate. All faculty members regularly teach entering as well as advanced students. The teaching staff for the Regional Center for Languages and Cultures (RCLC) teaches outside the College as well as within it, and has schedules and obligations specific to it.

Faculty members are expected to serve on standing and *ad hoc* committees and to participate in a range of ongoing and special events and activities related to such areas as admissions, development, and orientation. They are also expected to pursue actively their professional interests and to integrate their professional activities into their teaching as much as possible.

Bennington has no separate graduate faculty, except in the case of the low-residency M.F.A. program in writing, which employs a roster of prominent writer-teachers. Part-time faculty members have the same kind of responsibilities as full-time, with proportionally lesser obligations of time. Half-time faculty member contracts include active participation in governance responsibilities as well as classroom responsibilities. About half of the College's current graduate students do some teaching under the supervision of regular faculty as their experience in their field permits.

Bennington has adopted an academic freedom policy that is unequivocal in maintaining its commitment to intellectual freedom, in the context of a statement that articulates faculty obligations as well as privileges. Responsibilities of faculty members and faculty governance structures are detailed in a number of documents provided to faculty upon their appointment to the College. Examples are available in the workroom.

Faculty Governance

Faculty members, both full- and part-time, individually participate in formulating academic policies and practices through serving on the academic policy committee (APC), the faculty review committee (FRC), the faculty grievance committee (FGC), and in the ongoing development throughout the faculty of new curricular initiatives. The composition and workings of the APC, the FRC, and the FGC are discussed in Standard Three. Groups of faculty organized around related disciplines continue to serve important functions. For example, the dance, drama, music, and visual arts groups organize and monitor the status of productions, concerts, galleries, and exhibitions. In addition, these groups arrange guest artists and speakers; review M.F.A. applications and interview candidates; oversee technical support personnel, interns, and instrumental instructors; and, in the case of dance and music, organize the weekly workshop. In addition, all faculty serve on panels that supervise the curriculum of each student at Bennington as it develops over four years. These panels involve faculty from a variety of disciplines working together to assure that the education of each student has a responsible design

that adheres to the educational goals of the College. Faculty also work closely with the office of admissions to assure that the educational possibilities of the College are communicated adequately and accurately. In addition to weekly meetings of the APC, the faculty as a whole meets monthly; the agenda for those meetings is set by the APC.

Faculty Recruitment

Faculty recruitment is an especially critical and challenging obligation and involves all faculty and all academic administrators, including the president. Bennington seeks active practitioners who bring the same order of passion and talent to teaching that they bring to their practice. Although traditional venues for recruiting faculty—advertising in appropriate professional contexts, for instance—are used routinely, recruitment efforts are by no means limited to such strategies. Search committees, appointed by the dean in consultation with the APC, include faculty from within and beyond the area of expertise of the candidates. These committees are responsible for the organization and orderly pursuit of the search. All faculty are encouraged to participate in the process of recruitment and selection. Students also actively and regularly engage in the selection process. Final recommendations for appointment to the faculty are submitted to the dean of the College and the president for approval prior to final approval by the trustees. In addition, a number of visiting appointments are made at the discretion of the dean and the president.

The College actively welcomes applications from members of minority groups. Bennington does not differentiate between full-time and part-time faculty in terms of criteria for appointment or compensation (generally on a pro-rated basis). Review procedures differ depending upon the length of the appointment rather than whether it is full- or part-time.

Faculty Contracts, Review, and Support

Faculty contracts—individually negotiated between each faculty member and the College, acting through the president or the dean—extend in length from short-term residencies of a few weeks to multi-year contracts that typically span one- to seven-year periods. Faculty members are reviewed by peers, the dean, and the president.

All faculty appointments require board approval. Peer review is handled through the faculty review committee (FRC) and/or consultations between

faculty and the dean. The dean of the College makes an independent evaluation in consultation with the faculty and in the event that either the faculty or the dean, or both, recommend an appointment, the president decides whether or not to recommend the candidate to the trustees for approval. The FRC interviews candidates under review and solicits written comments from peers from within and outside the College and from students. Criteria for the FRC review are stated in the document outlining the responsibilities of this committee and are included in the packet provided to all new faculty. In reviewing faculty, the dean and the president consider the current needs of the institution, in addition to applying the criteria shared with the FRC.

The College, through the office of the dean, annually provides modest support for faculty development to assist faculty in professional work outside of the College, including presentations at conferences.

In addition, paid sabbatical leaves and the option of unpaid leaves of absence are granted by the dean of the College upon recommendation of the academic policies committee. The College policy and procedures for sabbatical and unpaid leaves are included in the workroom.

APPRAISAL

As a result of the redesign of the College, major changes occurred in the area of faculty organization—the abandonment of the divisional structure—and in the instituting of an individual contract system to replace what was known as presumptive tenure (two three-year reviews, followed by five-year reviews).

The abandonment of the divisions has succeeded in allowing the primary emphasis on matters of financial and educational policy to be addressed from the perspective of the College as a whole. The success of the new initiative in the teaching of teachers in involving the entirety of the faculty offers particularly clear evidence of that. The centralizing of academic support budgets in the dean's office has also worked well in achieving balance, consistency, and the assurance of the primacy of an institution-wide perspective. This accomplishment is especially critical in an institution as small as Bennington.

What remains to be accomplished on this front is to develop compelling additions to disciplinary curricular development at the structural level. That

has only happened sporadically, with new combinations emerging more frequently at the individual course level than at the multiple course level. A look at the curriculum makes this clear. While a substantial number of original and intellectually stimulating courses are offered that involve inventive faculty collaborations across disciplines, sustained faculty collaborations of this kind that could develop new clusters of courses have been less frequent and less original. Time, as always, is an issue, but it is even more an intellectual and psychological challenge to break new ground in areas where the traditional ways are entrenched, for very understandable reasons. A current initiative, which is very encouraging, takes new work on mind/brain/behavior as a starting point for generating an ongoing conversation between scientists and artists that will eventually resonate throughout the curriculum.

Students have responded with alacrity and imagination to the opening up of potential collaborations and juxtapositions and will undoubtedly play a major role in encouraging faculty to be bold in initiating new faculty combinations. The substantial elaboration and refinements of the supervision of student plans, outlined in Standard Four, provides this new openness with the very important added dimension of continuous faculty scrutiny.

One result of the absence of divisions has been a shift in administrative responsibilities. The position of divisional secretary—known in other institutions as “department chair”—no longer exists. Consequently, the burden of the work normally accomplished by this position has shifted to the faculty at large and to the dean’s office. The strain of this is evident, and we continue to wrestle with questions of structure, efficiency, and oversight.

The shift from a templated faculty contract system to one that is individually designed has been surprisingly smooth, given the complex and charged issues that surround contract issues. While significant differences of opinion surely exist among faculty about this new system, they are the kinds of differences that are endemic to any contract system. What differentiates the Bennington model from others is the flexibility it provides for both the institution and the faculty, and the focus of responsibility and accountability on the president.

To attract and retain quality faculty in the future, the College must make salary adjustments where appropriate. Bennington’s limited resources make this a challenge, but it is important to ensure that our faculty compensation

practices, in conjunction with other benefits and attractions of working at Bennington, allow the College to maintain a competitive position.

PROJECTION

The primary task for the future is to sustain the momentum of the redesign and to provide the kinds of support that will enable faculty to devote more time to exploiting the possibilities for curricular innovation that the redesign of the College provides. Most centrally, that means continuing to strengthen the financial resources available for these purposes. It also means continuing to attract faculty who, in addition to the criteria of professional and teaching excellence, bring the intellectual fire, emotional confidence, and rich imagination that such innovation demands.

More specifically, during the next three years Bennington will:

- continue to strengthen and develop programmatic initiatives that engage faculty across disciplinary lines, such as the B.A./M.A.T. and mind/brain/behavior programs;
- develop new initiatives, e.g., in community service and the arts and in environmental science, that have the potential to connect faculty across the arts, humanities, and sciences;
- explore alternative models to the departmental structure for overseeing curriculum and assisting students (such as the committee structure at the University of Chicago), which provide the order and flexibility compatible with Bennington's educational mission;
- establish a compensation committee at the board level to work with the president, vice president, and dean to review compensation practices to ensure that Bennington is able to retain a first-rate faculty.

**STANDARD SIX:
STUDENT SERVICES**

DESCRIPTION

The office of student life and campus services strives to maintain a safe, healthy, educational, and socially stimulating residential community. The office is engaged in fostering an environment conducive to the intellectual, moral, and emotional growth of each student. To support the educational mission of the College, this office works in partnership with faculty in bridging the gap between students' academic lives and their lives outside the classroom. The governing organizations of the College—the student council, student educational policies committee, the academic policies committee, the campus activities board, community council, and campus life committee—encourage students to join with faculty, staff, and administrators in partnerships that shape the academic and nonacademic life of the College. By serving on these committees, the faculty gives support and advice to the office of student life and campus services on matters affecting the social, residential, and intellectual life of students.

The office of student life and campus services is a source of guidance and information for students concerning any aspect of campus life. The office provides services that include recreational outdoor experiences, on-campus intramural sports and tournaments, cultural and social events, food services, telephone services, postal services, and general support and advocacy. In addition to the College's full-time security coverage and on-call psychological services, the student life staff also provides 24-hour emergency on-call coverage.

Student self-governance operates within a context of rules, regulations, and policies intended to assure the health, safety, and well-being of the whole community. The student handbook, revised annually, details the tenets governing student behavior. The philosophy that guides student services corresponds to the College's mission and is stated in the preamble to those tenets.

Bennington College was founded on the principle that intellectual development cannot and should not be isolated from the development of the whole person, and that as much as possible, in the general College arrangements, especially individual guidance, should give proper weight to physical, emotional, moral, and aesthetic as well as to intellectual factors and personal growth. To be engaged, to be disciplined, and to be responsible is to possess self-knowledge, or to be educated.

Orientation

Orientation comprises pre-orientation training for student orientation assistants, house chairs' training, and the program for new students. Orientation assistants, selected through a rigorous application process during the spring term, assist with developing and implementing the orientation program.

Orientation for new students introduces first-year, transfer, and reentering students to College programs, to faculty advisors, to one another, and to the campus itself. Orientation activities include panel discussions, student-to-student workshops, special speakers, a dance party, films, dinner with faculty advisors, and a health issues presentation. An international student orientation, held two days before the all-College orientation, gives international students a chance to acclimate themselves. Beginning in 1999, international students also write a diagnostic essay.

Additionally, for the past two years we have provided optional pre-orientation backpacking trips for new students, which have proven to be very successful. These trips are designed to help first-year students form relationships and ease the transition to college life. Additional orientation programs are offered for graduate and transfer students.

The office of student life works in conjunction with the office of admissions and the first year and the dean's office to monitor first-year students' social and academic adjustment to college life. We schedule one-on-one and focus group meetings with students throughout the first year.

Residential Life

Housing on campus consists of 15 student houses, each accommodating approximately 30 students in double or single rooms. Generally, all undergraduate students are required to live in College housing. Exceptions are made for students over 24, students who are married and/or have dependent children, and seniors, under certain conditions. The College owns one off-campus house in North Bennington that, in recent years, has housed graduate students. All houses are coed; each has a large living room and a kitchenette; all common areas are smoke- and alcohol-free. Storage space is at a premium; its lack continues to be an ongoing problem.

A strong sense of community exists within each student house. The characteristics are determined by each house and vary greatly, but students are united in their commitment to individuality within the communities.

After receiving a completed housing questionnaire from new students in the summer, the assistant director of student life and campus services pairs all first-year students and assigns rooms to all new students. Returning students select their house and room for the next term through either the in-house room selection process or the change of house lottery. All housing processes and room changes are monitored. The residential committee—chaired by the student residential coordinator, advised by the assistant director of student life and campus services, and including house chair volunteers and at least one student council representative—works on setting policies and priorities and serves as an appeals board for in-house disputes.

Each house has two house chairs, paid peer assistants who play a pivotal role in determining the quality of student life by providing leadership, support, and assistance to their house communities. House chair candidates are nominated by their house communities, and then go through a selection process coordinated by the office of student life and campus services. The selection process has evolved over recent years—previously, house chairs were popularly elected or chosen by default, and the position was unpaid. The process now entails a written application, followed by an interview with a member of the student life staff, a current house chair, and a member of student council. Based on feedback from

the interview team, the office of student life then selects the house chair body.

House chair responsibilities include:

- maintaining a safe, healthy living environment;
- running coffee hour, an informal weekly house meeting where timely information about policies, procedures, and upcoming social and educational events is provided;
- encouraging student academic, personal, and social development, in conjunction with the offices of student life and the dean;
- facilitating and supporting first-year students' adjustment to college.

Eligible house chair candidates must have been at Bennington for at least one year and cannot be on academic or disciplinary probation. House chairs, in addition to their in-house responsibilities, also serve on a number of committees (the residential, training, and health committees) and work on *ad hoc* committees and projects.

The office of student life and campus services supervises, trains, and supports house chairs. Their in-depth training covers substance abuse, safety and security, mediation, and a review of College rules and regulations during orientation. The assistant director of student life and campus services meets with each pair of house chairs every two weeks to discuss issues and concerns. The house chair body meets weekly with student life staff to disseminate information and discuss issues of importance to the residential community.

In spring 1999 the office of student life and campus services met with a group of house chairs to discuss the head of house chairs position. Formerly, the head of house chairs was a student leader position elected from within the house chair body to act as liaison to the student life office, assist in running weekly meetings, and serve as a member of the talking heads committee. As previously defined, the position did not adequately serve the needs of house chairs or the office of student life and campus services. As a result of the review process, the position was redefined and restructured as the student residential coordinator. The coordinator, who reports to the assistant director of student life and campus services, chairs the residential committee, acts

as a liaison to student council, and represents residential concerns on the talking heads committee.

Students living in campus housing are required to participate in the College board plan. All meals are served cafeteria style; there are six dining rooms and a veranda. The food service staff serves three meals a day, five days a week, and a brunch and dinner on Saturday and Sundays. The snack bar is open seven days a week, from 11 a.m. to 12 midnight.

International Students

Bennington's current 52 international students comprise 11 percent of the overall student body, approximately the same percentage as last year. These students are from India, Bulgaria, Pakistan, Russia, France, Canada, Spain, Turkey, Peru, Israel, Nepal, Germany, and Yugoslavia. International students provide the greatest measure of ethnic and cultural diversity on campus. Our commitment to maintaining this significant population is supported by substantial financial aid awards to foreign students. Their integration into the College has facilitated cultural sharing and learning among the student community. The associate director of student life, who is in regular contact with the Vermont Office of the Immigration and Naturalization Services, coordinates their immigration status and paperwork. Counseling, both personal and academic, is shared by the offices of student life, the dean, and admissions. The field work term (FWT) office also works with international students to plan for their special needs concerning travel and work off-campus during FWT.

Student Conduct

In choosing Bennington, students accept the challenge of active participation in their education and community. The College does not only expect its members to be part of it; rather, it asks each student to take part. Therefore, as stated in the handbook, students are expected to govern themselves. Bennington's mission statement directly addresses the philosophy behind self-government: "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." This concept of

self-governance defines Bennington's disciplinary system and is reflected in the expectations of student conduct by the College and by the students themselves.

Students and their house chairs are expected to bring infractions against community standards to the attention of the director of student life and campus services or his delegate. Other members of the community may also identify and refer possible infractions. These infractions may be settled by negotiation or by referring a formal complaint and any additional pertinent information, to the judicial, administrative review, or sexual harassment hearing committees.

The judicial committee consists of a student chair, three elected members from the student body, and three appointed members from the faculty and staff. The administrative review committee consists of the dean of the College, the vice president for finance and administration, and a faculty or staff member appointed by the president. Sanctions for infractions of the tenets of student behavior may range from a letter of reprimand to a fine to suspension or expulsion. The detailed hearing processes and procedures are outlined in the student handbook and reviewed by both disciplinary bodies at the start and end of each academic year.

The College's policy and procedures on sexual harassment deal with incidents involving sexual harassment and sexual assault. This system includes trained peer, staff, and faculty advisors. Mediation and/or hearing processes are also used, if appropriate. The sexual harassment hearing committee is made up of faculty, students, and staff. This policy, first enacted by the board of trustees in 1990, is reviewed and revised annually to conform to state law and to improve processes. During the spring 1999 term, a series of seminars was offered for staff, faculty, and students regarding state and federal sexual harassment laws and College policy. These seminars reviewed case-specific situations, created a forum for discussion, and reviewed available campus resources.

Student Government

Since 1994 the College has encouraged students to develop a comprehensive, cohesive form of governance. With the help of the

campus life committee, the student council has been developed to replace the house chair system as the main student governance body on campus. Composed of elected student delegates, the student council is a deliberative and executive body, the essential forum for discussion of campus issues of concern to students. The head of student council may call all-student meetings to discuss College issues. Student council may make recommendations concerning College policies and procedures and advise the faculty, staff, and administration of student opinion on pertinent issues. The council also supervises student elections for other representative committees, including the judicial and student educational policies committees and the campus activities board. A primary responsibility of student council is to recommend the appropriation of student funds to student organizations. However, the entire student body, at house meetings, votes on the actual appropriation. Student council also oversees and assists various student-run organizations on campus.

The campus activities board (CAB), an organization formed in 1998, assists students in planning and coordinating student events on campus. CAB was formed to promote students' taking a more active role in the planning of campus events. Membership of the committee consists of the student head of CAB, a position selected by the student life office through an application and interview process; a secretary; a treasurer; and six committee members elected by students. The associate director of student life serves as advisor to CAB. Its members meet weekly, during which time students are invited to propose ideas for events. The committee is responsible for choosing events to fund, helping to plan and implement events, and generating ideas for events that meet the diverse needs of the community. Committee funds for hosting events come from the student activities fund and the office of student life and campus services budget.

The student educational policies committee (SEPC) is composed of two student representatives per academic discipline or programming group, elected by the student body. SEPC representatives collate and distribute end-of-term class and faculty evaluation forms used for faculty contract evaluations. They consult on process concerning the end-of-term class evaluations as well as make other suggestions to the dean of

the College. SEPC also considers larger questions of academic policy in the College community.

The chair of each major student organization is also a member of the talking heads committee, which meets regularly to discuss campus issues, to foster cooperation among organizations, and to coordinate activities. They also meet regularly with the dean of the College and the director of student life.

Student Activities

The Café, located adjacent to student residences, is a space designated for social activities. The upstairs Café offers an alcohol-free space for quiet conversation, student performances, poetry readings, and visiting artists. It has an espresso bar and offers homemade desserts, as well as a big screen television and VCR, which can be reserved and used by anyone during Café hours. The downstairs Café, available for registered parties, has a sound system, dance space, pool table, and a dart board. This space is frequently used by the CAB for programming.

Another student space is Commons lounge with a pool table, television, and snack bar. The Commons building also houses the post office, dining halls, student government offices, health and psychological services offices, and student practice space for music and dance. The Commons lounge and dining rooms are occasionally transformed into spaces for weekend theme parties.

Funds allocated from the College budget are distributed through the student council to a variety of campus organizations, including *SILO*, the student literary magazine; the film society; W.H.I.P., a radio station; the campus activities board; the theater group, Second Stage; *Commons*, a satirical student magazine that addresses campus events; *The Palladium*, a student newspaper; the student endowment for the arts; the women's group; and to other groups for *ad hoc* events. Activities available to students vary from term to term depending on the interests and needs of students. The women's group offers lectures and activities regarding women's issues and this year sponsored *The Vagina Monologues*, an event touring college campuses around the country. Second Stage sponsors evenings of student-directed scenes and readings of student plays-in-progress. *SILO* features student visual art, poetry, short fiction,

playwriting, and prose. The film society shows several films weekly, ranging from the classical to the bizarre; and *Palladium* is published several times per term. The student endowment for the arts sponsors and supports student performances, shows, and projects that are open to the community.

A Day Without Art, an AIDS awareness event, is a collaborative production cosponsored by the office of student life and various academic disciplines. This year's event featured special readings by the president and dean of the College. Students have organized benefits each year for local AIDS organizations and for the Project Against Violent Encounters, a local agency that provides support services for survivors of domestic violence.

The College offers a range of special events open to students free of charge throughout the year, including the annual Ben Belitt lecture by a distinguished author or scholar, the Neilds/Mortimer/Hambleton fellowship program for visiting artists and thinkers, the Robert Woodworth lecture series on the natural sciences, and events such as the National Theatre of the Deaf performance and workshop, held last year.

College Week is a publication coordinated by the student life office to inform students and the community of campus events. Recently revised, *College Week* provides a streamlined foldout calendar with all campus events listed. Students may pick up *College Week* along with a list of campus announcements and a separate list of job and career opportunities in the post office and other locations around campus. *College Week* is also sent to area colleges for posting.

Recreational/Fitness Opportunities

In response to greater interest in physical fitness and recreational opportunities, the College has expanded its programs, employs a full-time recreation director, and is building a larger fitness facility, which is expected to be completed during 1999. Many of our new recreational opportunities reflect the ideals of spontaneity, risk-taking, and cooperative play. To that end, many are day-long events that do not require an ongoing commitment, affording a variety of opportunities for students.

Outdoor programs include hiking and rock climbing, caving trips, backpacking, and whitewater rafting expeditions. We offer clinics for beginner and intermediate levels of tennis, self-defense for women, cross-country skiing, and rock climbing. Other recreational activities include yoga and karate classes, badminton and pool tournaments, a three-on-three basketball league, ultimate frisbee, and flag football. The office distributes several recreational newsletters to the community.

Bennington continues to field a coed soccer team that plays intercollegiate games with other colleges in southern Vermont and western Massachusetts. Throughout its eight-game season, the soccer team sparks campus interest, enthusiasm, and support.

A newly formed outing club is taking shape, with more than 30 students enrolled. One of the goals is to have students lead trips, such as the pre-orientation backpack outings. Wilderness first aid and leadership courses are planned for spring 1999.

The fitness center, primarily a weight room with some cardiovascular equipment, offers a treadmill, stationary bike, full range of Olympic free weights, a small climbing wall, and a rowing machine. About 50 students per week use the center. Students may also check out sporting equipment, including basketballs, soccer balls, volleyball, tennis racquets, badminton, and croquet sets. Students, staff, and faculty heavily use the fitness center. Outdoor facilities consist of four clay tennis courts, a basketball court, a volleyball court, and a soccer field.

BRIDGES: Bennington Conflict Resolution Program

BRIDGES, the Bennington College Conflict Resolution Program, is a program for students by students. It offers assistance in resolving conflicts between students by promoting communication and developing skills to support constructive dialogue. A range of programs, including workshops, formal mediation, and informal conflict resolution, encourage students to take an active role in achieving resolution and making conflict resolution a part of their education.

Community Service Program

Bennington established a program in public and community service in spring 1995. Since then, it has involved students, faculty, and staff in

courses and research, volunteer service, and critical reflection on the relationship between them. Students now volunteer regularly in most area schools, at Head Start, The Tutorial Center, retirement homes, the Vermont Arts Exchange, the Project Against Violent Encounters, Sunrise Family Resources Center, the Bennington Area AIDS Project, and in a host of other community settings. In collaboration with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, the program created the Bennington Cooperative Service Council to coordinate volunteer activity throughout the county.

Among the projects developed by the program are the Community Registry, which brings community members into local schools to share experiences and expertise; multicultural projects, including international students teaching at local schools during field work terms; on-campus restoration, such as improving hiking trails and clearing overgrowth; special classes for high school students, such as contact improvisation, Shakespeare, and photography; Kids at College, in which local school children spend a day taking classes and meeting students; and individual mentoring. In addition, the program has made presentations to prospective and incoming students and parents, and has conducted research, employing student interviewers, designed to explore student attitudes toward and experiences of service and to stimulate discussion about service. These efforts have substantially increased awareness of the responsibilities of community citizenship, both on- and off-campus.

Substance Abuse

The office of student life and campus services provides funding and support for campus-wide programming to address alcohol and drug use and abuse on campus, including funds for increased staffing, programming for non-alcoholic events, and preventive education on substance abuse. The student health and campus life committees and the community council all address issues of substance abuse on campus, and health services provides educational programs. The College's alcohol policy is consistent with state and federal laws. Our policies stress moderation and individual accountability for those who choose to drink lawfully and foster an atmosphere that is free of pressure for those who choose not to drink.

Psychological Services

The office of psychological services provides clinical services to students, consultation to the campus community, and consultation to programs affecting College students within the town of Bennington. A staff of two licensed psychotherapists offers a range of clinical services to students, including crisis intervention, diagnostic evaluations, and ongoing treatment (both short- and long-term psychotherapy). The staff also refers students who wish to seek treatment off-campus to other area clinicians. Two psychiatrists are available and on campus one day a week for psychiatric evaluations and ongoing medication consultations. Staff members are on call and carry beepers to provide emergency coverage off-hours. Weekly in-service seminars address current issues in the etiology and treatment of disorders affecting college-age students. The staff consults on campus with individuals and groups, including house chairs, the student health committee, members of the faculty, and the dean. The director of psychological services meets regularly with other senior administrators and participates in the formulation of policies affecting students' lives at the College. All student clinical records are confidential.

The service is financed mainly by the College, but fees collected from students allow staffing to meet demand. To avoid waiting lists and to educate students about insurance coverage and fees, a fee schedule applies for longer-term therapy.

To evaluate the clinical component of the service and to provide information, the staff gathers extensive statistical data annually. The service also participated recently in an ongoing comparative study of 20 college mental health services conducted by Franklin and Marshall College.

Health Services

Health services, in medically equipped offices in the Commons building, provides direct care, laboratory testing, health counseling, education outreach programs, and preventive services to students. The experienced professional staff includes a family nurse practitioner, two registered nurses, and a family practice physician during scheduled hours.

Physicians are on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Referrals for consultation by outside providers are made when appropriate. Health services is open Monday through Saturday during term, with varying hours that are convenient to students. During the hours that health services is not open, the on-call physician may be reached by contacting security. All care provided in health services is strictly confidential and cannot be discussed without written consent from the student. Most services provided on campus are covered under the College's mandatory student health charge and supplemental insurance. Entering students must show documentation of meeting certain health requirements before registering. These include a recent physical examination, updated immunizations, and a PPD skin test to screen for tuberculosis. The health services staff and the student health committee work together to choose health education topics, which have included substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, first aid, and blood-borne pathogen education.

Security

The security department coordinates campus security and safety, with a force consisting of a director and six full-time officers. Security reports to the vice president for finance and administration. The campus is covered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Officers are trained in emergency medical procedures, first aid, and CPR; they do not carry weapons or have powers of arrest. They conduct a system of vehicular and foot patrols of the campus and student residences. The force has a working relationship with the Bennington police and the Vermont State Police, who assist when called on but do not conduct independent patrols of College-owned property. Regularly traveled areas of the campus are generally well lighted. A member of the College community may report an emergency or a potential criminal action on campus by dialing the emergency extension number, listed in all campus directories. Extension phones in each house have the emergency number posted on them. We publish a brochure on campus security each year, and annual reports on campus crime statistics are also available.

Security department staff is highly visible and dedicated to assuring the safety and security of all students and staff on campus. The

officers know most students on a first-name basis and have an excellent working relationship with students. Students trust security and are for the most part cooperative and supportive. Security officers receive on-the-job training, which serves the College's needs well. Careful selection of individuals applying for positions, comprehensive training that includes education in substance abuse and detection, and monitoring of attitudes and performance have resulted in a group of dedicated professionals.

Financial Aid

The financial aid staff consists of a director, assistant director, and coordinator. The director reports to the vice president for finance and administration and works closely with the admissions professional staff.

The availability of financial aid funds and the appropriate application procedures are outlined in the Bennington curriculum sampler, given to all who inquire about College admission. Included with every applicant's and student's financial aid award is the financial aid handbook, a more detailed look at policies and procedures. That handbook is updated and distributed annually. Financial aid staff is available during work hours to assist applicants, parents, or current students. Student borrowers have individual loan counseling sessions with financial aid staff when they enter Bennington and before they leave or graduate.

The financial aid office is located near the admissions and business offices. The office relies heavily on a computer-based financial aid program for processing and tracking applications. In addition, it uses electronic transfer of information with the Department of Education for purposes of establishing federal financial aid eligibility and transferring Pell grant information and with Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, the state guarantee agency that originates and services most of the loans Bennington's students take. The office also has Internet access through which it receives policy information from the Department of Education, the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, state organizations, and lenders.

Because changes in federal policy and other market forces greatly affect the administration of financial aid, the director and assistant

director maintain active relationships with professional organizations through which they obtain information about financial aid issues. The director regularly attends conferences and regional meetings.

The College considers students and their families to be the primary resource for meeting education costs. If a student does not have the resources to manage the cost of a Bennington education and applies for need-based financial aid, it is College policy to provide as much as possible of the aid needed (as calculated by the financial aid office) through a combination of loan, grant, and work. Most often, the College does not meet full federal need, but awards as much as possible, given limited funds for institutional aid. Bennington also offers merit-based aid scholarships. These recipients are chosen by the admissions office. The financial aid office, with knowledge of the merit-based scholarship already awarded, determines any additional need-based financial aid to be offered.

International students complete the College Scholarship Services foreign student aid application and the certification of finances. In addition, we require statements of wages and benefits from the parents' employers. Domestic aid applicants submit the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) as well as a Bennington College financial aid application, copies of appropriate tax returns, and a non-custodial parent's statement as applicable. Students who feel that the aid offered is not adequate may request that the financial aid appeals committee review their awards.

The College allocated more than \$3.6 million of its own funds to financial aid grants and loans in 1998-99. These funds went to approximately 343 students, or 82 percent of the undergraduate student body. This figure includes 102 merit scholars (Brockway and Bennington Scholars), most of whom had financial need and received other aid as well. Another 16 students received no College grant funding but utilized student or parent loans and/or participated in the federal work study (FWS) program.

Work opportunities on campus are available to FWS students during the school terms. Non-work-study jobs on campus are also available, though less plentiful. There are a number of off-campus,

community service FWS jobs, including several literacy tutor positions at local elementary schools.

Bennington offers a low-residency Master of Fine Arts in writing; smaller M.F.A. programs in dance, music, and visual arts; a Bachelor/Master of Arts in teaching (B.A./M.A.T.); and a post baccalaureate program in the health sciences for students with a non-science baccalaureate degree who want to attend graduate school in the sciences. The graduate writing program offers a limited number of merit-based awards through the Kenyon Scholarship, and some teaching assistantships are offered in the M.F.A. programs in dance, music, and visual arts. Otherwise, students who are not undergraduates depend on loans as financial aid.

Bennington provides special fellowship assistance for qualified B.A./M.A.T. students who transfer to the College at the beginning of the junior year. These students may receive up to \$20,000 per year in Bennington teaching fellowship funds, or in a combination of those funds and Pell and/or state grant monies. These funds are for the undergraduate years only.

For tables representing 1998-99 figures on undergraduate and graduate financial aid awards, see the appendix.

All files in the financial aid office are locked each night, as is the office itself. Because of the confidential nature of the files, no student workers are employed in the office.

APPRAISAL

The office of student life and campus services continually strives to improve and maintain relationships between the College and the student body. Office personnel are accessible and approachable, and try to provide an environment on campus that is conducive to academic rigor, but also balanced by opportunities for recreational and social outlets. Staff emphasizes problem-solving with student involvement, soliciting input early in the development of ideas from student leaders and the student body as a whole. Furthermore, the office aims to be flexible, changing when change is warranted.

In terms of orientation, feedback from essays that first-term students write to describe their initial experiences at Bennington indicates that these programs are effective. We believe the value and success of the orientation program is due, in large part, to the collaboration among the offices of admissions and the first year, student life and campus services, and the dean.

The quality of residential life at the College continues to be of great importance to the leadership of the College, and in recent years significant progress has been made. Alcohol and substance abuse, while not eliminated, has been greatly reduced, as evidenced by fewer incident reports. The College is committed to keeping public spaces in College housing substance-free and has met with some success in this area. The reconfigured house chair system, with leaders who have committed to improving residential life, has been influential in this turnaround.

Student self-governing bodies at Bennington, along with the rest of the College, continually go through changes, shifts, and periods of adjustment. We are in one of those transition periods, but student involvement and participation in student government remain strong. Student council has been reestablished and is becoming more influential and effective in representing student concerns. One issue the council faces is finding a way to create year-to-year continuity that allows for both change and stability.

With the change in the house chair selection process implemented three years ago, house chairs, as paid student staff members, are fully accountable to the office of student life and campus services and help to plan and participate in a comprehensive training experience preparing them for their duties and responsibilities. We believe Bennington's distinctive system of peer advisors, refined through the years, now truly reflects the essence of the Bennington experience.

The process of reexamining the role and responsibility of the head of house chairs is underway. We find that the position has not functioned well for a number of years, and has caused confusion within the community as to the role of the house chair body in relation to the function of student council. The office of student life and the house chairs continue to struggle with these issues. The current reexamination

may mean a shift in student leadership; we continue to explore ways to offer more leadership opportunities to students.

The new campus activities board (CAB) has significantly improved event scheduling and facilitation, but other issues need further development. The members of the board seem willing to generate ideas and plan events, but lack consistent commitment to execute plans. The board's funding process also needs clarification; currently the student activities budget provides funds through the student council budget process.

We have a serious shortage of non-academic and non-residential space for student use. Currently CAB and other groups find it difficult to plan weekly events because of inadequate facilities. The downstairs Café formerly served this purpose, but with increased enrollment and a need for flexible and creative uses of space, it is not large enough and is inappropriate for many events. As a result, a variety of other spaces is adapted for use, many of them inappropriate, leading to disorganized space scheduling, conflicts in space usage, and additional efforts to convert space to functional levels, which incur additional costs. Although plans for the renovation of Commons include using the third floor as a student event space, no working solution has been found to bridge the gap between the project's completion and present needs.

According to the Franklin and Marshall study that Bennington's psychological services office participated in, Bennington students use the service more than other participating colleges. The effectiveness of the psychological services staff is evident on campus and also in comparison with peer group centers.

Student health is a complex combination of quality, accessibility, patient satisfaction, and cost. The staffing mix of health care professionals is a source of ongoing discussion. Cost considerations and the general wellness of the student population indicate staffing the health center with non-physician health care providers, such as nurse practitioners, with physicians on call during off-hours. However, this has raised questions of patient satisfaction and competency with students who prefer to be seen by a physician.

Promoting healthy behaviors through cessation of smoking, avoidance of alcohol and drug abuse, and exercise and healthy eating are

the health priorities on campus; creating educational programs that affect behavior and culture change to avoid preventable illness is our challenge.

Recent incidents of vandalism on campus demonstrate that we still have progress to make in instilling ideals of community responsibility and self-governance. The vandalism has taken the form of graffiti on the walls of the houses and Commons and the setting of several small-scale fires; we have experienced an unusual number of personal thefts on campus as well. While most students find this behavior unacceptable, the challenge is to encourage students to police their community.

PROJECTION

Adequate space for student events, student organizations, student government, study and lounge space is one challenge for the future. The student life staff is working with the land and building use committee to designate space for student organizations. More important, the board of trustees has acknowledged the lack of student space, and is exploring ways to resolve this issue.

Recent changes to the election process for the student council allow for an overlapping of positions, which should provide needed continuity. During the coming year, we will evaluate the effect of these changes; our expectation is that, as the council reemerges as the dominant instrument of student governance, stability and continuity will increase accordingly.

The renovation of Commons would add significant space for student use. Part of the plans for a renovated Commons would establish it as the campus center, which would house the office of student life and campus services. This change, in and of itself, would expedite an improved relationship with students, make the office more accessible, and facilitate the needs of the community. It would also provide a more appropriate, modernized space for health and psychological services offices.

As the College continues to grow, the psychological and health services staff will have to work hard to maintain a commitment to

providing a broad range of therapeutic services to students and effective consultation to others in the community. Psychological services staff will continue to keep abreast of current research, holding weekly seminars during spring 1999. Health services staff will try to communicate options for second opinions and follow-up care more clearly, and develop protocols for challenging diagnoses, ongoing multidisciplinary interaction, and planning and evaluation between the psychological and health services offices.

Bennington continues to encourage a significant faculty and staff presence on campus after hours. Faculty and staff now occupy 11 of the 12 faculty/staff apartments in student houses. In the coming academic year we will explore ways to involve these faculty/staff residents constructively in house activities. We believe this will help with the issue of community responsibility versus personal freedom.

STANDARD SEVEN A:
LIBRARY RESOURCES

DESCRIPTION

Goals

Bennington's Crossett Library supports the creative and individualistic educational tradition of the College. It strives to be innovative, dynamic, and flexible in providing library service central to the academic and personal growth of its community of users. The library encourages increased user self-sufficiency, and a broad interpretation of its role within a wider educational context, with a special emphasis on exploiting new information technologies. The attitude of staff is considered essential in accomplishing these goals, requiring a combination of professional competence, concern for the needs of the community, and a spirit of collaboration.

The Collection

Supporting the multi-faceted curricular needs of students and faculty is a guiding principle of Crossett's collection development and service. In areas of the College's strength, such as dance, drama, and the visual arts, the collection is developed by selective purchasing of quality materials in the field combined with acquisition of in-depth materials that reflect the work of students and faculty. In the remaining areas, acquisition policy remains focused on meeting more immediate curricular needs. With few exceptions in recent years, the library has honored all specific faculty requests for acquisition of materials for reserve readings and curricular use. We purchase high-priority items immediately, and lower-priority materials over time. Current resources limit acquisition of periodicals.

Crossett Library houses about 120,000 volumes, including approximately 500 current periodical titles. The collection includes 25,000 slides, a growing videotape collection of 1,200 titles, and a small number of audiotapes and CD-ROMs. The library was originally designed to house 70,000 volumes, and even with the addition of compact shelving, staff must continually shift and prune materials to address space concerns.

The Jennings Music Library has been integrated as a part of Crossett Library. It houses 5,000 scores, 700 books about music, 50 videos, and more than 9,000 sound recordings. The major holdings of music reference materials and literature about music remain at the Crossett Library.

Over the past five years the collections of other former divisional libraries on campus have been integrated into the Crossett Library collection. This has improved our video collection and made these materials accessible to the entire College community. Informal reading rooms in the science building and in the visual and performing arts building (VAPA) house older journals and duplicates not placed in the regular collection. Selected dance materials most apt to be used in teaching are housed in a separate dance archives in VAPA.

Recent curricular initiatives—in teaching (the B.A./M.A.T. program) and languages (The Regional Center for Languages and Cultures [RCLC]), for example—have required a reallocation of funds to extend the range of the library's collection. Most of the items recommended by the faculty members in these areas have been purchased. So far this has been accomplished without compromising the collection in current curricular areas. To assure the continuing capacity to respond to new initiatives, funding for library needs should be budgeted in the planning stages of such initiatives.

The library continues to avoid formulaic subject allocation, giving priority to faculty who demand the most intensive library use from their students and to students with specific requests. Professional staff works closely with faculty to develop the collection. In the last few years, in addition to working with the RCLC and B.A./M.A.T. programs, librarians have worked on modest special collection development projects with faculty in biology, physics, ecology, painting, ceramics, sculpture, design, architecture, social psychology, and anthropology. We also use the standard library review resources and buy titles of obvious relevance.

As access to online resources improves, we evaluate standing orders and serials and adjust the collection, omitting titles where information is readily available online at low or no cost. Online resources and the College's changing curriculum have also necessitated continuous evaluation of periodicals. Working closely with faculty, we have eliminated some titles and added others. Long- and short-term value to study and research and relevance of materials to the curriculum are among the criteria considered.

Gifts of books and other materials, many of high quality, continue to constitute a significant proportion of new acquisitions. The library also recently received some modest financial gifts that have helped develop our collections in science and contemporary poetry.

Less than a third of the collection remains classified in Dewey rather than Library of Congress. Upon completion of the retrospective conversion project in 1997-98, we shifted our attention to reclassification. Last summer we converted a controlled number of items and evaluated the project to determine the most effective procedures and cost/time estimates for reclassifying the entire collection. As the year 2000 approaches, however, decisions to upgrade and expand the automated library system have taken priority over reclassification.

The collection, obviously modest, has significant gaps; interlibrary loan service remains essential to our mission. The number of items borrowed annually averages about 2,000. Reference librarians guide students to appropriate resources in our collection prior to initiating interlibrary borrowing. We have reciprocal agreements for direct borrowing with Williams and Southern Vermont Colleges. The collection at Williams is a particularly helpful resource. The library provides full service interlibrary borrowing through membership in the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) and the Vermont Automated Library System (VALS).

Technology and Information Resources

Like most other academic libraries, Crossett Library has seen dramatic changes in information technology and information resources. The library currently houses a small public cluster of seven computers and provides connectivity throughout the facility. The College offers access to the Internet and the World Wide Web and the library has used this tool extensively. Each staff person has a computer as well.

In June 1994 Crossett acquired an automated circulation system. For the next few years, we focused on retrospective conversion of the catalog. MARC records were created for all items. A portion of the collection had earlier been available on a computer catalog through three CD-ROM loaded Bibliofile workstations; converting the rest enabled us to provide through the computer catalog a single point of access to the entire collection. With a grant from a librarian/alumna, the catalog was loaded onto the Web using NetPac. This

provided catalog access to students from their rooms and faculty from their offices and classrooms. In January 1999 we implemented an integrated library package, Library.Solution, which enabled us to provide not only the status of materials, but immediate access to those materials as soon as they were entered into the system.

The library developed a Web page that offers access to the catalog, a list of special resources available in selected subject areas, "Webliographies," and access to online databases that include ERIC, Infotrac, and Lexis/Nexis. We also offer MLA Bibliography on a CD-ROM workstation. Working closely with consortia such as OCLC and Northeast Regional Libraries (NERL), the library has actively promoted creative pricing strategies such as the fee-per-FTE, which allows us to offer Lexis/Nexis Academic Universe. Online searching of Dialog databases is available with professional assistance. We hope to add more full-text access as appropriate and as fiscal resources allow. The Web site also provides links to additional libraries and resources. Instruction in the use of the Web and information resources has been provided to students, staff, and faculty by the reference and outreach services team.

The library currently loans digital cameras and often functions as a front-line desk of service and assistance for general computer-use questions. The library staff works closely and well with the information technology staff. While our small size and limited resources do not always allow us to be at the "cutting edge," the library works to maximize appropriate use of technology to advance studying and learning.

Staff and Services

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librarian. As in most small libraries, everyone wears many hats and works in teams. Regular staff and team meetings and annual evaluations ensure healthy communications. Flexibility allows staff to be used effectively and provides them with opportunities for professional development, including workshops, conferences, and exchanges with colleagues at peer institutions. They embrace technology to enhance the services they provide and contribute suggestions for improving and following through with actions to implement these improvements. In addition, the library continues to depend on student assistants, hiring about 30 per term to cover approximately 6,000 hours.

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Circulation statistics remain steady. The most significant contacts between user and staff occur when a student or faculty member has a specific topic to study or item to find. A very proactive reference staff gets to know students individually and does not hesitate to approach users and ask if they need assistance. They offer general and class bibliographic instruction in the

library or in the classroom. Staff provides numerous library guides and helpful print and non-print materials. Subject Webliographies, referred to earlier, are online information resources with links provided by our librarians in collaboration with selected faculty members.

The reference staff provides a senior thesis guide and hosts the annual thesis unveiling, which has become a central, end-of-term event for graduating seniors, their friends, and the faculty. The library also sponsors a variety of programs, exhibits, and displays, which recently included a fashion history of costume books and magazines, student-produced handmade books, and a special alumni exhibit. A full listing of displays and exhibits appears in the annual reports.

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Facilities

Crossett Library, designed by architect Pietro Belluschi to house 70,000 volumes, won the American Institute of Architects First Honor Award when it opened in 1959. It remains attractive and functional. The addition of compact shelving and the rearranging of collections and furniture as well as major physical improvements, including energy efficient lighting and upgraded electricity, rebuilding the front steps, replacing the front door, and repairing and repainting the outside of the building, have confirmed the resilience of the design. We have recently replaced our security gate, which has reduced loss of materials and provided a reasonably accurate head count. Our current seating capacity is about 100, including 50 reserved carrels. Video and slide viewing stations are available and a computer cluster has been added. The library has no seminar or audio-visual rooms. Staff areas have been rearranged to accommodate computer workstations.

The Jennings Music Library, now part of the Crossett Library, is the only other library facility on campus; it is staffed by student assistants and a non-professional librarian with an interest in and knowledge of music. The librarian reports to the Crossett Library director and receives training and support from the library staff. She attends staff meetings and coordinates selection of

materials and technical services. Jennings provides a comfortable setting for students to study and listen to music. The library has listening rooms and a computer with modem access to the Internet.

APPRAISAL

The Collection

The collection, while small, is carefully selected to support the curriculum and, to a lesser extent, to support the individual needs of our students and faculty. The collection needs to continue to grow; central to that growth is the need for additional space.

We have identified quality information resources online that have allowed us to allocate our budget more efficiently. Interlibrary loan services play a central role in enriching our collection, and supplemental funding for collection development to support new curricular initiatives needs to be allocated.

The staff works well with faculty and students in soliciting collection development recommendations. Gifts remain an important element in developing the collection. Reclassification of items from Dewey to Library of Congress needs attention.

Centralization of library resources, supported by the entire community, has led to greater access and use of these materials and a general attitude of what is best for the College rather than for individual units. Planning is underway to integrate the holdings of Jennings into the online catalog and link their services onto Crossett's integrated systems. We anticipate that better access to the Internet and the College's network will be provided by fiber optics, microwave, or other developing technologies. The dance archives, for example, might be merged in a central location as digitizing becomes possible. Currently the collection is well organized and appropriately housed at the Crossett Library and on site for teaching dance at VAPA.

Technology and Information Resources

The library has made significant progress technologically, both in implementing library applications and providing information and technology services and resources. The commitment to an integrated library system, the completion of retrospective conversion, the connection to the Internet, and the establishment of a library computer cluster have significantly expanded and improved library

access and services. We need to continue to monitor this quickly developing area, carefully selecting tools that genuinely improve services while avoiding technology for its own sake or trendy but insubstantial new products.

The library must continue to teach effective use of these resources and verify the quality of new information resources. Funding to upgrade hardware, software, and information resources has become part of the operating and capital budgets. We must be vigilant about the long-term and multi-year cycle planning necessary to continue our progress. Y2K compliance issues have been thoroughly addressed.

Staff and Services

The library continues to have a strong staff, which is a key factor in realizing its mission. The team structure allows broad-based staff input in decision-making. Student staff is well trained and makes a significant contribution to the running of the library.

Service and outreach remain high priorities. Special events, such as the thesis unveiling, allow the library to celebrate student accomplishments. The archives need funding and staffing, which may tie into the commitment to providing an appropriate space in a library addition. The library looks outside itself, serving local patrons and the educational community as part of consortia and cooperatives, and should continue to pursue collaborative opportunities. And as always, the staff needs to reach out to those who do not use the library to its fullest potential.

While archival procedures have improved, much remains to do, not the least of which is providing adequate space for the storage, management, and display of such materials. Recent discussions have also included centralizing and digitizing the dance archives, investigating a graduate student internship at the library, and organizing and digitizing College photographs.

Facilities

As enrollment increases, the need for additional space for a library and information resource center reasserts itself as a priority. In addition to housing a growing collection, increased staff and increased use, additional space should include seminar and audio-visual rooms, a special collections and archives area, and a technology center.

PROJECTION

Crossett Library has been, and must continue to be, not only a partner but also a leader in the educational mission of Bennington College. To achieve that goal we must:

- Increase the strength of the collection consistent with our commitment to Bennington's educational tradition.
- Advocate for start-up funds to build the collection in new areas of study.
- Continue progress towards an integrated automated library system by identifying and acquiring additional modules to the Library.Solution suite (e.g., acquisitions and serials). It is also necessary to interact effectively with the College's administrative software to access the database for updated and accurate information, to bill for library charges, and to create and monitor purchase orders, which will lead to more efficient operations.
- Reclassify materials still in Dewey to Library of Congress to provide optimal access to the collection. We are currently assessing the scope of this project to determine strategies and budgets for completion.
- Retrospectively convert the holdings of the Jennings Music Library collection; the records are currently being collected and transposed into computer-readable format.
- Continue to work with the College architects to develop plans for a library addition to meet space needs.
- Optimize the appropriate use of information resources to increase access to information. We are already exploring creative fee structures with information providers to provide full-text access to large collections of information, and will look for ways to work with consortia and cooperatives to share resources in creative collaborations.
- Consider appropriate consolidation of resources between the library and Information Technologies, particularly if these resources can be combined in a single facility.
- Address the archival challenges by providing adequate archival and special collections areas and staffing support for a long-term and sustainable archival program.

- Devise short- and long-term plans for computer upgrades and replacements; this work is current and continuous.
- Continue to expand opportunities for the evaluation of library services.
- Nurture the creativity, resourcefulness, imagination, and strong service ethic of the versatile library staff, including providing additional professional development and training opportunities. Consider adding one additional staff position, most likely in reference, as enrollment reaches 600.

Available in the workroom are the Crossett Library vision statement; copies of annual reports, 1994-1995 through 1997-1998; library policies and procedures; staff resumes; and an organization chart.

STANDARD SEVEN A: LIBRARY RESOURCES

DESCRIPTION

Goals

Bennington's Crossett Library supports the creative and individualistic educational tradition of the College. It strives to be innovative, dynamic, and flexible in providing library service central to the academic and personal growth of its community of users. The library encourages increased user self-sufficiency, and a broad interpretation of its role within a wider educational context, with a special emphasis on exploiting new information technologies. The attitude of staff is considered essential in accomplishing these goals, requiring a combination of professional competence, concern for the needs of the community, and a spirit of collaboration.

The Collection

Supporting the multi-faceted curricular needs of students and faculty is a guiding principle of Crossett's collection development and service. In areas of the College's strength, such as dance, drama, and the visual arts, the collection is developed by selective purchasing of quality materials in the field combined with acquisition of in-depth materials that reflect the work of students and faculty. In the remaining areas, acquisition policy remains focused on meeting more immediate curricular needs. With few exceptions in recent years, the library has honored all specific faculty requests for acquisition of materials for reserve readings and curricular use. We purchase high-priority items immediately, and lower-priority materials over time. Current resources limit acquisition of periodicals.

Crossett Library houses about 120,000 volumes, including approximately 500 current periodical titles. The collection includes 25,000 slides, a growing videotape collection of 1,200 titles, and a small number of audiotapes and CD-ROMs. The library was originally designed to house 70,000 volumes, and even with the addition of compact shelving, staff must continually shift and prune materials to address space concerns.

The Jennings Music Library has been integrated as a part of Crossett Library. It houses 5,000 scores, 700 books about music, 50 videos, and more than 9,000 sound recordings. The major holdings of music reference materials and literature about music remain at the Crossett Library.

Over the past five years the collections of other former divisional libraries on campus have been integrated into the Crossett Library collection. This has improved our video collection and made these materials accessible to the entire College community. Informal reading rooms in the science building and in the visual and performing arts building (VAPA) house older journals and duplicates not placed in the regular collection. Selected dance materials most apt to be used in teaching are housed in a separate dance archives in VAPA.

Recent curricular initiatives—in teaching (the B.A./M.A.T. program) and languages (The Regional Center for Languages and Cultures [RCLC]), for example—have required a reallocation of funds to extend the range of the library's collection. Most of the items recommended by the faculty members in these areas have been purchased. So far this has been accomplished without compromising the collection in current curricular areas. To assure the continuing capacity to respond to new initiatives, funding for library needs should be budgeted in the planning stages of such initiatives.

The library continues to avoid formulaic subject allocation, giving priority to faculty who demand the most intensive library use from their students and to students with specific requests. Professional staff works closely with faculty to develop the collection. In the last few years, in addition to working with the RCLC and B.A./M.A.T. programs, librarians have worked on modest special collection development projects with faculty in biology, physics, ecology, painting, ceramics, sculpture, design, architecture, social psychology, and anthropology. We also use the standard library review resources and buy titles of obvious relevance.

As access to online resources improves, we evaluate standing orders and serials and adjust the collection, omitting titles where information is readily available online at low or no cost. Online resources and the College's changing curriculum have also necessitated continuous evaluation of periodicals. Working closely with faculty, we have eliminated some titles and added others. Long- and short-term value to study and research and relevance of materials to the curriculum are among the criteria considered.

Gifts of books and other materials, many of high quality, continue to constitute a significant proportion of new acquisitions. The library also recently received some modest financial gifts that have helped develop our collections in science and contemporary poetry.

Less than a third of the collection remains classified in Dewey rather than Library of Congress. Upon completion of the retrospective conversion project in 1997-98, we shifted our attention to reclassification. Last summer we converted a controlled number of items and evaluated the project to determine the most effective procedures and cost/time estimates for reclassifying the entire collection. As the year 2000 approaches, however, decisions to upgrade and expand the automated library system have taken priority over reclassification.

The collection, obviously modest, has significant gaps; interlibrary loan service remains essential to our mission. The number of items borrowed annually averages about 2,000. Reference librarians guide students to appropriate resources in our collection prior to initiating interlibrary borrowing. We have reciprocal agreements for direct borrowing with Williams and Southern Vermont Colleges. The collection at Williams is a particularly helpful resource. The library provides full service interlibrary borrowing through membership in the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) and the Vermont Automated Library System (VALS).

Technology and Information Resources

Like most other academic libraries, Crossett Library has seen dramatic changes in information technology and information resources. The library currently houses a small public cluster of seven computers and provides connectivity throughout the facility. The

College offers access to the Internet and the World Wide Web and the library has used this tool extensively. Each staff person has a computer as well.

In June 1994 Crossett acquired an automated circulation system. For the next few years, we focused on retrospective conversion of the catalog. MARC records were created for all items. A portion of the collection had earlier been available on a computer catalog through three CD-ROM loaded Bibliofile workstations; converting the rest enabled us to provide through the computer catalog a single point of access to the entire collection. With a grant from a librarian/alumna, the catalog was loaded onto the Web using NetPac. This provided catalog access to students from their rooms and faculty from their offices and classrooms. In January 1999 we implemented an integrated library package, Library.Solution, which enabled us to provide not only the status of materials, but immediate access to those materials as soon as they were entered into the system.

The library developed a Web page that offers access to the catalog, a list of special resources available in selected subject areas, "Webliographies," and access to online databases that include ERIC, Infotrac, and Lexis/Nexis. We also offer MLA Bibliography on a CD-ROM workstation. Working closely with consortia such as OCLC and Northeast Regional Libraries (NERL), the library has actively promoted creative pricing strategies such as the fee-per-FTE, which allows us to offer Lexis/Nexis Academic Universe. Online searching of Dialog databases is available with professional assistance. We hope to add more full-text access as appropriate and as fiscal resources allow. The Web site also provides links to additional libraries and resources. Instruction in the use of the Web and information resources has been provided to students, staff, and faculty by the reference and outreach services team.

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- Address the archival challenges by providing adequate archival and special collections areas and staffing support for a long-term and sustainable archival program.
- Devise short- and long-term plans for computer upgrades and replacements; this work is current and continuous.
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- Nurture the creativity, resourcefulness, imagination, and strong service ethic of the versatile library staff, including providing additional professional development and training opportunities. Consider adding one additional staff position, most likely in reference, as enrollment reaches 600.

Available in the workroom are the Crossett Library vision statement; copies of annual reports, 1994-1995 through 1997-1998; library policies and procedures; staff resumes; and an organization chart.

STANDARD SEVEN B: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

From an academic perspective, Bennington recognizes the importance of technology as a tool for discovery, for the integration of knowledge, and for the expansion of the uses of imagination. From an administrative standpoint, the College must have an efficient, integrated computer system to effectively manage its operations and planning functions.

While acknowledging that we do not have to be on the leading edge in computer technology applications, we equally cannot afford to provide anything less than reliable, responsive support in the basic technological capabilities. With this in mind, priorities include the maintenance of basic, reliable hardware and software support for the daily administrative, academic, and student computing needs; installation and development of programs designated as institutional priorities; training focused on basic and required computer skills; and reliance on the Internet to meet most requirements of faculty and student development work.

Computer Resources

The College has undertaken two major technology projects over the last year. It has installed a fiber optic backbone to support new and upgraded telephone and data lines, and it has begun implementing an integrated administrative software package. Administrative computing is being migrated to PCs, while the computer labs, now exclusively Macintosh, will include both Macs and PCs. In the past students were required to purchase Macintoshes, but are now encouraged to acquire any computer that meets the College's recommended minimum requirements.

The College's fiber optic backbone is connected to the Internet, and is accessible though every workstation on campus. We are currently evaluating software for managing and further securing our network. Other campus network resources include a student file server, a Web server, a mail server, and remote dial-in hardware that supports 10 incoming calls.

Full access to the Internet is currently available from student rooms, faculty and staff offices, and classroom buildings throughout campus, except for the Jennings Music Building, where modem access is available. A fiber optic network installed by Lucent Technologies in 1998 has enabled the College to meet our goal of optimizing the resources available through the Internet. Training on the Internet and its resources has been centered in the library.

Last year the College decided to install an integrated administrative software package developed by the Quodata Corporation to replace existing individual programs—some quite inadequate for their purposes—and to provide capabilities not otherwise

available. Quodata consists of Windows-based client-server modules that provide an open standard for storage and retrieval of departmental data. This platform provides strong integration of word processing, spreadsheet, and database programs, along with flexible reporting tools to meet departmental reporting requirements. We will also be developing Web-based modules.

Quodata's browser-based capability will help meet the challenges of a dual platform campus. The complete installation will include business office, financial aid, admissions, dean's office, and student life modules. The student bills and financial reporting system (FRS) modules are currently being implemented. The admissions and student modules are scheduled for implementation within the next two years. Once up and running, this software will allow the College to administer its operations much more efficiently and improve information exchanges among offices.

The College now provides an adequate level of annual operating financial support to accomplish the basic IT mission, although our resources will be challenged as we manage a dual-platform computer population. We have also made a significant commitment within the last year to funding the wiring upgrade and installation of the new administrative software system and related computers. Because of budget constraints, the College is not able to provide computers to faculty members, except as may be required for administrative purposes.

Public computing resources on campus include 12 multimedia workstations and two laser printers at the computer center in the Dickinson Science Building. This facility, designed in 1995, accommodates all necessary computer equipment and is conducive to individual and group projects and inquiry. The adjacent language media lab, whose primary mission is to help students acquire language proficiency with the aid of multimedia software and to permit faculty to author multimedia language-learning materials, houses 14 workstations. Eight computers and a laser printer provide access to information resources available in the Crossett Library, and another four multimedia workstations and a color plotter are housed in the Visual and Performing Arts building (VAPA). Policies guiding the use of computer resources are consistent with the College's rules and regulations as listed in Tenet 16 of the 1998-1999 student handbook.

From the fall of 1995 until last year, entering students were required to purchase multimedia-capable (until 1998, exclusively Macintosh) computers. We have eliminated this as an absolute requirement, but continue to encourage students to acquire their own computers because we believe it important that they develop or enhance their computer skills and that individual ownership promotes this objective.

Because word processing and e-mail can easily be performed on student-owned computers, the College has concentrated on providing applications and resources that supplement student's basic technology needs, rather than directing resources towards meeting basic needs. We provide some training and support, but need to improve our services in this area, including more effectively training student staff, offering more opportunities for learning new applications, and providing information and help resources on the Web.

Staff computers on campus number approximately 250; most are Apple. However, with the purchase of the Quodata system, the College has begun its shift of administrative computing to PCs. We are addressing the challenges of supporting dual platforms.

Staff and Services

The computer center is open from 9 a.m. to midnight, with longer hours arranged at the busiest times, and is staffed by professionals from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., and by students during all additional hours. Services include telephone help, assistance while working in the computer labs, and in the afternoons, professional attention to hardware and software issues on a first-come, first-served basis.

General service for staff computers is provided in-house. Limited service is provided for student and faculty-owned computers. We are currently reviewing how we can provide better service, including considering out-sourcing, as we begin to support a wider variety of computers and a system of direct purchasing of computers by students through their own vendors. Advanced network system maintenance is out-sourced.

The manager of computer operations oversees all administrative computer and network services, the computer center, and the computer support staff. The staff includes a technical specialist with primary responsibility for supporting the Quodata system installation; a PC user support specialist, also supporting the administrative system; a network specialist; and an office manager. In addition, students are employed to monitor the computer center and to provide telephone and on-site assistance. We are currently evaluating additional staffing needs, with the specific objective of providing better support for the computer center and ensuring adequate backup.

Finding excellent staff with strong technical and interpersonal skills, combined with a strong service ethic, has been a major challenge. After almost a year of searching, we hired a manager of computer operations in May 1998 to help our computing operations achieve its goals. Recently we also hired an experienced technician to support the implementation of the administrative software system. In addition, the staff includes the director of information services, two technical support specialists, and an office manager who is responsible for hardware and software purchasing, assets management, budget recordkeeping and reconciliation, user sales, and operational oversight of the service and support center. In addition, we hire 14 students per term for 110 hours per week to monitor the computer labs and provide telephone and basic on-site support.

Staff stays current by attending workshops and conferences. Bennington is an active member of a number of consortia and organizations, including the Association of Vermont Independent Colleges Technology Group, the Vermont Higher Education Association for Technology, the New England Regional Computing Program, the New Media Consortium, and EDUCAUSE.

A committee of students, faculty, and staff meet periodically to address service and support concerns as well as other technology issues. Users have been surveyed and the results have been helpful. Currently we are reviewing the process of how concerns are documented to ensure they are responded to efficiently and effectively.

The College Website is administered by the office of development and communications, with support from the IT staff. The focus is on improving the Website to ensure that it is accurate and up-to-date, although not necessarily at the forefront of technology. Changing institutional needs are assessed quarterly. Recently, student creative work has been added. We hope to have the College curriculum on the Web by spring 1999, and are considering loading the College directory.

Year 2000 compliance issues have been addressed over the last year. The library's new system and the Quodata administrative package are both Y2K-compliant, and we have contacted vendors to confirm compliance. As few of our other computer programs and systems are PC-based at this time, we anticipate no major problems.

APPRAISAL

Computer Resources

To date, the computers on campus have been adequate to supplement the use of personal computers. At the busiest of times, usually the end of each term, College-provided resources are strained, particularly the use of laser printers. It continues to be a challenge to keep all of the equipment in the public clusters in continuous working order.

Instructional classroom space with adequate computing resources may become an issue in the future. A full-time faculty position has been added to teach computer art and graphic design; support of this program will require the College to increase the number of computers in the VAPA cluster and examine the administration of that cluster.

We need to do a better job of documenting a long-term replacement policy for all computing resources on campus. Security issues are continuously being addressed and funds have been allocated to upgrade our security software. We are gradually moving towards a system of centrally administered hubs and networks. Significant time and energy must be committed to ensure that the new integrated administrative software package is implemented effectively.

Staff and Services

We continue to provide less than optimal support and service to our community of users, and we do not currently provide adequate training and supervision for our student staff.

With the move to a dual platform campus, supporting a wider variety of hardware and software is a challenge. We are reviewing options, including combinations of in-house and out-sourcing service configurations.

The College Webpage generally is viewed as inadequate in its present form. Discussions about its mission and direction, and how it should be developed, are currently underway. A major overhaul, expected to begin by fall 1999, will address design, navigational, and content issues.

PROJECTION

The College's recent major investment in new computers, a comprehensive administrative software system, and the campus fiber network represent a significant commitment to improving information technology and resources for the community. The rapid deployment of related hardware and systems, the pace of technology development itself, and our limited resources, however, present challenges that must be addressed:

The administrative system. The time commitment required of IT staff in meeting the demands of deployment and training related to migrating most of our administrative offices to a new platform and software is very high. The College, therefore, is outsourcing some IT projects to meet our needs, and is closely managing the deployment

cycle to conform to our ability to support both hardware and staff. We are evaluating additional resources for training and support to supplement internal staff services, and expect to define them before calendar year end. Full implementation of the Quodata system modules now planned is expected by the end of FY 2000. We are currently reviewing all campus databases not part of the Quodata project for future integration and/or migration to a new custom Bennington database developed in-house. This is targeted for late calendar year 2000.

Security. With the deployment of a centralized, networked administrative system, it is critical that a security system be implemented to protect the databases. This project is now underway using an outside vendor, and should be installed by the beginning of fall term 1999. Upon completion, the system will provide secure access locally and have the capability for encrypted remote access from off campus. Secure Web access also is currently being developed and tested, and is scheduled for full implementation by year end 2000.

Infrastructure. The College has started the installation of a campus network management system to provide the foundation for a solid network infrastructure. It will provide monitoring and maintenance features for our network equipment to ensure maximum uptime and performance of the network. This system will also provide great insight to the growing bandwidth demands of the campus network and will be used as a measuring device to aid in future decisions about equipment upgrades. This project is expected to be completed during fall 1999.

Public computer labs. Integration of IBM compatible PCs into the labs will begin this fall to support students with both Macs and PCs. Long-term hardware/software assessment and replacement plans will be established over the next year. A search is currently underway for a computer center lab coordinator to support the public computer labs. This person will provide focused support for the labs, manage the help desk, develop training workshops, and create printed and Web-based documentation. A primary responsibility of this staff member will be improvement of training and better utilization of student support staff.

Policies, procedures, and monitoring. Several key areas will need focused attention as new software and systems are deployed over the next year, including development of better systems for documentation, tracking and managing of hardware/software assets, IT projects, and help desk inquiries. These currently are being defined and will be initiated during the latter half of this calendar year.

Webpage. IT will assist with technical installation and support in the implementation of the revised Bennington Webpage when the design is completed.

STANDARD EIGHT: **PHYSICAL RESOURCES**

DESCRIPTION

Physical Plant

The main campus of Bennington College encompasses approximately 550 acres and 61 buildings. In addition, the College owns a house on a 90-acre property in Shaftsbury, known as the Brick House, which serves as the president's residence. One off-campus student residence, Welling Town House, is located in North Bennington.

Primary buildings of the College include:

Dickinson Science Building (33,766 square feet). Dickinson was built in 1969. Even though programs and instrumentation in science have expanded substantially over the years, Dickinson remains spacious and generally satisfactory for the teaching of the sciences. The building has the advantage of having been designed to permit reconfiguration of walls and laboratories with relative ease. It currently houses 12 faculty offices; five teaching laboratories, nine prep laboratories; student research spaces; two special-purpose temperature-controlled rooms; five classroom/seminar rooms; office space for clerical and technical support staff; a reading room; a faculty lounge; a greenhouse; an NMR facility; two storerooms; a large workshop; a mechanical room; and an auxiliary generator for Dickinson and Commons. In 1994 and 1995, space was reconfigured to establish a computer center for general use by students and a separate computer language lab for the College's Regional Center for Languages and Cultures. An adjacent area contains offices for the information technology staff responsible for maintaining the computer center and for providing computer support services throughout the campus.

Tishman (4,761 square feet). Adjoining Dickinson, Tishman is a lecture hall with a capacity of 250 persons. It has projection facilities.

Visual and Performing Arts Center (VAPA) (116,073 square feet). Completed in 1973, this major facility houses extraordinary teaching, performance, and exhibit facilities for dance, drama, and the visual arts. Three large performance spaces—Martha Hill Dance Workshop, Lester Martin

Theater, Greenwall Music Workshop—and one smaller space, Margot Tenney Theater, meet professional-level standards and afford great flexibility.

Connecting these four is Newman Court, used for various formal and informal gatherings. The Usdan Gallery accommodates major College and visiting shows in the visual arts. VAPA also contains several smaller spaces that are used for both rehearsals and performances, and a costume shop and scenery workshop. Studio spaces for sculpture, ceramics (including kilns in a separate structure), painting, graphics, and architecture are complemented by a variety of smaller teaching studios, photography darkrooms and studios, and student studio space. A number of smaller buildings around campus also house studio space for visual arts students. A cluster of six advanced multimedia computers is located within VAPA for student use. The structure also contains a vault used to store a large portion of the College's art collection and archives.

Jennings Hall (20,087 square feet). The original Jennings mansion now houses the music facilities of the College. It includes 10 practice rooms, all with pianos; teaching studios for music faculty; and the Hoffberger music library. The lobby of Jennings, which retains the original decor, was restored in the early 1990s. The building is in need of some renovation and is not currently wired into the College's data network because of the distance from, and cost to connect to, the campus hub.

The Deane Carriage Barn (5,238 square feet). The former carriage barn of the Jennings estate now houses rehearsal and performance space for music programs. It also serves as a hall for guest speakers and other functions.

The Barn (26,898 square feet). This building, the original barn of the estate, houses most of the College's administrative offices on the first floor, a number of faculty offices on the second floor, several conference rooms, the College bookstore, six large classrooms, and a community lounge.

Crossett Library (17,483 square feet). The library facilities are described in Standard Seven.

Commons (36,398 square feet). Commons has served, to a varying extent, as a social center of college life since Bennington's founding. The building houses the food services offices and dining halls, including a lounge area with snack bar; health and psychological services facilities; the post office; the laundry; and several administrative offices. The third floor of the building is largely unused because it is not in full compliance with fire and safety codes. As described in the appraisal section below, planning currently is underway, in

anticipation of full enrollment, to improve the building's space efficiency and circulation and achieve compliance with building codes and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Early Childhood Center (ECC) (three buildings, totaling 4,250 square feet). The ECC offers programs for children from age two through kindergarten. It is a laboratory school for the College's B.A./M.A.T. program, in addition to serving as a connection with the outside community at large.

Maintenance and warehouse buildings (19,429 total square feet). This complex includes the heating plant for 15 student houses and 15 outbuildings, central shipping and receiving, a range of workshops and repair shops, the warehouse, and office space for maintenance management and staff. A large second floor room in the warehouse is used as a dance studio for faculty and visiting artists. As noted below, the warehouse is currently being renovated to serve as an interim location for the weight and fitness center.

The Café: (2,952 square feet). The Café is a student gathering place, supporting an upstairs limited menu food service and a downstairs party room.

Fitness center (1,000 square feet). This building, formerly used as the weight and fitness room, has some exercise equipment and a small climbing wall, but will be vacant once the new center is completed.

Observatory. Dedicated in 1993, the Rebecca B. Stickney Observatory replaced inadequate observation facilities formerly on the roof of Dickinson. It houses a professional-quality optical telescope with computer controls and digital camera, and a teaching room that can house a small planetarium dome.

Student houses. Fifteen student houses provide beds for approximately 465 students in single and double rooms. The houses are designed to look and function more as residences than as dormitories. Each includes a living room and kitchenette and has a faculty apartment with a separate entrance. The 12 original houses are designed in traditional New England style surrounding Commons lawn. During the last two years, the College has been refurbishing all the living rooms in these houses and plans to renovate the bathrooms and kitchenettes as well, with completion expected by February 2000. The three Barnes or "new" houses, built in the 1960s and of contemporary design, were not used during the two years of low enrollment but are now fully occupied.

Welling Town House (North Bennington). This house formerly provided efficiency apartments for six graduate students. Because of growing

enrollment, the house has been converted to undergraduate housing for 12 students.

Campus faculty and staff housing. Twenty-nine houses (some divided into apartments and rooms) provide temporary, and in some cases extended—generally up to three years, with limited exceptions—accommodations for approximately 45 faculty and staff. Several apartments and rooms are used primarily by faculty who commute to the campus.

Davis Alumni House. Established in 1986 as a guest house, Davis contains rooms available to alumni and other visitors to the College at a modest charge. The operations of the house are under the purview of a board composed of local alumni; the College's development office provides administrative support.

A less visible but important improvement to the campus has been a \$450,000 upgrade of our telecommunications and data network communications capabilities, including installation of fiber optic wiring connecting the central campus buildings and all student housing, which provides direct Internet access for all users on the network.

The campus grounds include a soccer field, tennis courts, and an outdoor basketball court. Commons lawn is also a site for informal athletic activities. The bulk of the main campus consists of agricultural fields, meadows, a pond, and a number of small woodlands and wetlands. The agricultural fields are maintained and hayed by a local farmer. The College contracts out all lawn mowing and snow removal services.

A pond and Paran Creek (at the western edge of the campus), as well as several meadows, woodlands and wetlands, are valuable resources for teaching in the natural sciences and recreation, including cross-country skiing, hiking, and nature walks.

In 1995, we established The College farm, a 10-acre parcel that is part of our ecology/botany program and also provides vegetables for the College's food service and a community supported agricultural project with more than 40 members. The farm is supervised by a resident farmer.

Safety/Access/Environmental

Physical safety. The College is firmly committed to providing each of its employees with a healthy and safe work environment, as expressed in the hazard communication program. All maintenance and dining hall employees

receive safety training. This commitment to health and safety extends to all contractors, who receive a contractor's health and safety information sheet. Groups that rent the College's facilities receive a safety information sheet.

Fire safety. Several fire safety improvements were implemented over the past several years:

- Smoke detectors were installed in all 15 student houses between 1995 and 1998.
- Fire alarms and exit and emergency lighting were installed in the Barn and Jennings in 1996.
- Secondary 200-amp service was installed in the original student houses in 1997.
- Sprinklers, fire alarms, fire stops, and doorways were installed in two student houses, Swan and Woolley, in early 1999.
- Wiring in several student houses has been upgraded.

Smoking regulations. During the last two years, all indoor spaces at the College, including all public spaces, have become smoke-free. More specific College rules were issued by the land and buildings use committee in early 1999 mandating smoke-free outdoor areas and providing defined outdoor smoking areas for each building.

Access. Three buildings are fully accessible, per the ADA: Dickinson Science Building, Tishman Lecture Hall, and the Visual and Performing Arts Center. Portions of other buildings on campus are not fully accessible.

Environmental safety. The College is equally committed to the safety of the environment. Four underground fuel oil storage tanks were removed in 1995 and an underground gasoline storage tank was removed in 1998. Above ground gasoline and diesel fuel tanks, in full conformance with the EPA regulations, were added in 1998. In 1996 the oil from one of the fuel oil tanks that feeds the boilers spilled into the storm drain, causing oil to enter the ground water. The treatment of this spill was conducted according to a work plan approved by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. Since the spill, the following safety measures have been implemented: sealed storm drain, installed oil/water separator and safety monitoring system, and added a berm around both active boilers. A spill prevention control and countermeasures plan has been implemented.

Management and Planning

The primary responsibilities for management of, and planning related to, the physical plant rest with the president, the vice president for finance and administration, and the director of facilities, who reports to the vice president and has immediate responsibility for supervision of College maintenance staff and use of outside contractors.

Day-to-day management of maintenance of the existing physical plant is the responsibility of the director of facilities. In conjunction with annual budget preparation, all identified deferred maintenance items are reviewed to establish priorities for the coming year—a process that will be substantially enhanced by the introduction of the new computer-based maintenance project inventory and work log. For the last two years, an *ad hoc* committee—including the president, the vice president, the dean, the facilities director, several senior staff members, and the architecture faculty representative—has personally inspected and reviewed all significant proposed deferred maintenance project sites during the budget preparation cycle, with the objective of arriving at a consensus on priorities. This has proved to be an effective means of gaining agreement on allocation of the deferred maintenance budget. In addition, the vice president meets frequently with the dean of the College, the special assistant to the president, and the director of student life and campus services to discuss space allocation and to address short-term and long-range planning for facilities.

The physical plant is maintained by a staff currently consisting of a head of housekeeping, a purchasing agent, a stockroom clerk, a secretary, and 22 staff members (two carpenters, two electricians, two plumbers, one groundskeeper, one painter, 11 housekeepers, two cleaner/movers and one locksmith), all supervised by the director of facilities. The size of the facilities staff has remained about the same over the last five years, although reduced from earlier periods. Major maintenance and renovation projects are generally let to outside contractors because of the limited trade capabilities maintained on staff.

In 1993, at the request of the board of trustees, the College hired architectural consultants, Ray Kinoshita and Marcia Hart, to develop a campus plan and oversee the implementation of the plan and any campus renovation or small-scale construction projects. Their original plan, *Campus Renewal for Bennington College: A Strategic Plan for Improvement to the Physical Plant*, served as a template for subsequent alterations to the College's structures; the

plan is available in the workroom. They worked on many projects over the years, including a handsome stonework entrance and handicap access to the Barn, the creation of the computer center and the language technology center in Dickinson, and a computer pod in VAPA. Recently, a new architectural consultant was hired to continue their work in assisting with the day-to-day design needs of the College.

In 1995, the campus land and buildings use committee (see Standard Three) formed to oversee certain aspects of the physical plant, particularly parking and alterations or installations to campus requested by students. Until then, additions or changes to the College landscape and buildings were haphazard and largely unplanned, without any individual or group responsible for the enhancement, safety, or protection of the campus environment. The committee meets regularly during and between terms; it has, over the last three years, designated zones on campus for particular use, considered student requests for the installation of art projects and monitored their maintenance and removal, redesignated some of the parking areas, and worked closely with the College architects.

With increases in student enrollment occurring over the last two years and projected over the next several, we determined in the 1997-98 academic year that additional student residences would be needed—most likely by fall 2000. A search by an *ad hoc* committee of the board for architects for the housing project was completed in July 1998, and Kyu Sung Woo Architects of Cambridge, Massachusetts, was hired. To facilitate the development of a plan for the houses, the College community participated in a series of well-attended program workshops with the architects during fall 1998. As a consequence of these discussions, it became obvious that the increase in enrollment would require addressing other pressing needs of the College: pedestrian circulation, vehicular circulation and parking, and the location of future buildings. A new campus plan developed by Kyu Sung Woo was presented to the board in March 1999. It evaluates the current state of the campus and provides a framework for the consideration of future improvements to the College's physical plant. It also anticipates three new residences for 35 students each, a renovation to Commons, a new recreation center, an addition to Crossett Library, and reworked pedestrian and vehicular circulation routes. As finances allow, these projects can be realized according to a series of planned design phases that

also incorporate adjacent master plan improvements. The new campus plan is available in the workroom.

APPRAISAL

In many ways Bennington's physical plant provides exceptional resources for a small liberal arts college. Other than the library (discussed elsewhere), academic space such as labs, classrooms, and studios is adequate, often generous, and generally well-appointed. One exception is seminar classroom space, which is limited at certain times of the day; also, individual studio space, while generally available to advanced students, is at a premium. Performance spaces are numerous and diverse, offering strong support for all of the performing arts. Laboratories in the sciences are spacious and well-designed and equipment substantially up-to-date.

While we have not yet achieved optimal student public access computer resources, we have made significant progress in recent years. Until the early 1990s, availability of computer facilities on the campus, for both academic and administrative purposes, was minimal. While still somewhat limited in the number of public access computers, since 1994 the College has maintained a Macintosh-based student computer center and customized computer language lab in Dickinson and a smaller graphics cluster in VAPA. In 1998 the College undertook a much needed \$450,000 upgrade of its telecommunications and data network communication capabilities. The College is currently implementing an institution-wide administrative computer system that will eventually result in the addition of more than 50 current-generation PCs for staff use.

On the whole, present academic and administrative space and facilities are adequate for current requirements, although reconfiguration, modification, or modest expansion is needed in some areas. The College also believes that the existing plant is generally sufficient to accommodate a 600-plus student population equivalent to that experienced in the early 1980s utilizing essentially the same physical resources, with the following exceptions:

Student housing. As described above, three new student residences will be needed by fall 2000, or at the latest, fall 2001. Although the College has had a student population of more than 600 in years past, several factors contribute to the need for additional beds when the enrollment reaches 600 again:

- The availability of off-campus housing, which previously could accommodate about 100 students, no longer exists.
- Formerly, students lived in apartments adjoining the student residences on campus. To maintain an adult presence on campus and to provide housing for new faculty and staff, these apartments are no longer available to students.
- Crowded conditions in the houses (many triples and under-sized doubles) are no longer tolerated by students and place undue hardship on the students and on the student life office staff.

Renovation of Commons. The renovation of Commons has long been an object of discussion at the College. Located at the center of the campus, the building is at the core of student life, providing many daily services, but is under-utilized and its four levels are difficult to navigate. The need for better access, compliance with building codes, consolidation of student services space, and additional student social space is even more acute as enrollment increases.

Crossett Library. An addition to the library, like the renovation of Commons, has appeared repeatedly on lists of College needs. Now, 40 years after the construction of the building, an addition to double the library's current capacity is included in the new campus plan and a feasibility study, with preliminary drawings, is underway.

Recreational facilities. The College fully recognizes the need for an indoor recreational and athletic facility. Currently, individual and group recreation is seriously limited by the types of space available. We are undertaking a significant renovation of the maintenance warehouse to accommodate a larger and improved fitness center, pending availability of permanent facilities. To be completed during fall term 1999, the new fitness center will have additional exercise machines, Nautilus equipment, a two-story climbing wall, a sauna, an aerobics room, and three times the space of the former center. While of high priority and identified in the recently prepared master plan, construction of a permanent indoor center with expanded facilities (perhaps racquetball courts, offices for the health center, and a swimming pool) is dependent on being able to obtain sufficient funding to accommodate the substantial cost.

Parking. Additional and reconfigured parking will be needed as the College population increases. The new campus master plan systematically

addresses this issue and maps out a workable and improved scheme that has been fully vetted by the community.

Other significant, campus-wide areas we must continue to address are:

Deferred maintenance. In recent years the College has not been able to direct desired resources to deferred maintenance because of budget constraints. While the physical plant is generally in satisfactory condition and without major problems, some projects have been significantly postponed or modified. The FY 1999 budget was increased over prior recent years, and some of the delayed projects were addressed, but more remains to be done. A comprehensive building survey was completed in March 1999 to establish a complete identification of all of the immediate and short-term needs and projects for each of the College's 61 buildings. This information is now readily available in a computer-based maintenance log that includes cost estimates and categories for each need or project based on structural, safety, utility, and appearance considerations. This will significantly facilitate the budget and work planning processes and allow deferred maintenance recommendations and decisions to be made with full regard to the overall physical plant needs and priorities.

Safety/access/environmental. The College recognizes a number of issues of access, physical safety, and environmental safety as needing continued attention:

- Sprinklers and fire alarms will be installed in the remaining 11 houses during the next four years as part of a program to ensure full compliance with all current fire safety regulations and requirements for student living spaces.
- New or improved lighting is needed in many areas of the campus.
- Environmental concerns continue to be raised in areas of VAPA, and proper ventilation is needed in some painting areas and photography studios.
- Several College buildings (especially VAPA and student houses) are distinguished by extremely inappropriate energy design for a cold climate; we hope that addressing this issue may lead to substantial savings in fuel bills and set a more environmentally appropriate standard.

Landscape plan. A less pressing need than other College priorities, but one that has surfaced in the course of developing the campus master plan, is a campus landscape master plan. Over the years and with limited resources, an

integrated and long-range approach to the flora of the campus has been largely ignored. Other than some intermittent tree planting, pruning and regular lawn care, little or no grounds maintenance has occurred. Aging or damaged trees need to be pruned or removed; drainage and irrigation to the College farm is required; formerly planted areas need attention; and landscape improvements to existing buildings would greatly enhance the appearance of the College acreage.

Since the time of the last self-study, a master plan that is realistic and ongoing for the College's physical plant has been put into place. It has created an awareness of the long-term physical needs of the College and an attainable, yet flexible, blueprint to follow.

PROJECTION

The new campus master plan sets in motion a phased approach to a number of projects to improve College facilities and circulation over the next five years. Construction of new student houses and the restoration and reclamation of space in Commons will provide the campus with new vitality, marking the beginning of our growth and expansion. Construction of the new student houses is set for spring 2000, with occupancy by March 2001. The feasibility study for Commons was finalized in April 1999, with schematic design to begin once funding is secured. The board hopes to move ahead with the Commons project and is seeking the necessary funding. As buildings are renovated, compliance with ADA and state and local fire codes, as well as improved lighting and parking access, will be incorporated as part of each project's scope of work. A landscape architectural firm, Douglas Reed Associates of Cambridge, Massachusetts, was hired this summer to work on the new houses and the new fitness center. A landscape master plan will be developed with them once adequate resources for the plan and the phased implementation of the plan are available.

The network of fiber optic cable, recently installed throughout campus, will enable campus utilities to be monitored and controlled from a centralized station. Additional energy-saving opportunities can now be explored. The energy efficiency of the facility and the effectiveness of its heating and power systems will be audited during 1999 by a company that specializes in

performance optimization. After the energy audit, new performance goals can be projected from the assumed implementation of energy-saving projects. Those projects having the best return on investment will be implemented first. In addition, a complete fire safety audit of all of buildings is scheduled for fall 1999.

The cataloging of deferred maintenance and related budget increases continues to address in a more systematic way the physical needs of the campus. A thorough review and development of an implementation program to address all remaining safety concerns on campus are immediate projects for the new director of facilities, who was hired in January 1999 and worked side-by-side with the outgoing director for the spring term.

The land and buildings use committee improves upon the work of the former facilities committee by integrating and regulating important aesthetic and practical aspects of the College's physical facilities. Their work for the coming academic year will focus on coordinating decisions to be congruent with the new campus master plan.

Great strides in the improvement of the condition of physical facilities have been accomplished in the last few years. The pace of our progress now is dependent upon funding, but the planning is solidly in place.

STANDARD NINE:
FINANCIAL RESOURCES

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

Nowhere are Bennington's fortunes over the last decade more evident than in our financial position during the period. For several years preceding the 1994 restructuring, the College's enrollment had been in a downward spiral, our limited resources were being seriously depleted, and our position in the very competitive market of small, selective, liberal arts colleges had grown perilously weak. Meanwhile, financial aid had grown from 24.5 percent in 1989 to 36 percent in 1993, further affecting the ability of tuition revenue to support routine operating needs. These circumstances, and those attending the restructuring, led to increasingly greater deficits until FY 1997, when a combination of enrollment turnaround, focused cost control, and successful fundraising reversed this unfavorable trend.

Six years ago, when the trustees decided to spend well more than a year exploring options for the College, they banked on the power of an educationally reanimated Bennington to achieve two things, both related to the financial no less than the educational integrity of the College. One was to recreate a school of sufficient distinction to reverse the enrollment decline, while at the same time maintaining admissions standards. The second was to galvanize enough alumni and foundation support to carry the College through a period of transition, which could be expected to present major demands on the institution.

Several other factors are critical in understanding the nature and extent of the financial challenges then facing the College. Recognizing that educational quality would be a decisive factor in Bennington's renewal, the trustees chose to sustain a faculty complement suitable to a full-enrollment student population, which at the time equated to almost twice the actual numbers of students enrolled at the lowest enrollment point. The trustees also committed the College to lowering tuition in real dollars by a total of 10 percent during a five-year period following the redesign. Finally, the period immediately following

the announcement of the redesign of the College, with its attendant publicity, aggravated the situation by resulting in a further decline in enrollment.

The fiscal challenges were, in sum, a match for the challenges facing the educational renewal of the College. While the progress in meeting these challenges has been somewhat slower than projected three years ago, our steady success is unequivocal.

In the intervening years, from the low point of 1995-96, the College has dramatically increased enrollment (see Standard Four) and raised unprecedented amounts of money from individuals and foundations. We have also engaged in a rigorous cost containment program, maintaining an essentially flat cash operating budget for the seven-year period between fiscal years 1991 and 1998. At the same time and despite strict controlling of costs, the College has allocated substantially more funds towards facilities maintenance than during the several years before the redesign.

During this period the College assumed some additional debt, while significantly reducing previously existing debt. Aside from endowment borrowing, over the 10-year period FY 1988-97 the College repaid a net \$4.8 million of debt. We borrowed a net of \$1.5 million in FY 1998-99, including the \$3.2 million raised through the Bennington Bond, a private placement. The College has not borrowed from the endowment since June 1997.

The accomplishments of FY 1997-98 illustrate the extent of Bennington's turnaround. With enrollment still very much in the midst of reaching the goals set by the trustees, the College recorded a net cash surplus of \$544,000 (including gifts and grants), one of only two surpluses—and the greater of the two—achieved during the preceding seven years. In addition, the College prepaid the full outstanding balance then owed (\$840,000) under the bank term credit in April 1998 from excess operating cash and Bennington Bond funding proceeds, and has not utilized bank credit lines since that time.

We anticipate the College will achieve its goal of a minimum of 600 students within the next three years, which will enable net tuition revenues plus the annual fund to balance routine operating costs. In the intervening period, we project that grants and gifts will provide \$3 million in the current year and \$2.5 million in the following two years, with the annual fund increasing by \$100,000 annually. To put this in perspective, the College has raised a record \$30 million in cash and pledges during the past five years.

Organization

The vice president for finance and administration is the College's chief financial officer, responsible for all aspects of financial operations, in addition to having supervisory responsibility for certain of the institution's non-academic functions. The position reports to the president. The vice president also serves as the treasurer of the corporation and, *ex officio*, of the board. The business office, under the direction of the vice president, performs most of the institutional tasks associated with the financial operations of the College. The office is staffed with an accounting manager and four other full-time personnel who perform various administrative duties. While no designated financial staff is located within other departments, some individuals perform budgeting and tracking support for their areas.

Key Financial Policies and Procedures

The College prepares its financial statements in accord with relevant, generally accepted accounting standards, audited annually by KPMG, LLP, with whom Bennington has had a longstanding relationship. All annual financial statements have been issued with unqualified opinions, and no significant accounting or control issues have been identified in recent years. The audit and management reports are presented to the finance committee of the board by the auditors and to the trustees at the October board meeting. The College uses cash-based financial reports for most internal tracking, planning, budgeting, analytical, and reporting purposes.

The fiscal year budget process is initiated in February, with the objective of presenting a preliminary budget to the trustees at the April board meeting for review and approval. Any subsequent budget adjustments and refinements are submitted to the executive committee of the board, and/or to the full board at the June meeting. Budgets are prepared by each academic and administrative organizational unit within parameters established by, and subject to the approval of, the president and the vice president for finance and administration. The vice president is responsible for developing and recommending the institutional budget for final approval by the president and, ultimately, by the board. The board is charged with the specific responsibility of approving changes in undergraduate fees.

The board adopted a written policy for investments in April 1998. The College works closely with counsel on an ongoing basis with respect to risk

management and insurance in all aspects of College operations. In all its fundraising activities, the College adheres to national fundraising standards and has fundraising policies that stipulate the conditions and terms under which gifts are solicited and accepted. These policies are periodically reviewed and updated.

In September 1998, Bennington began implementing a new, integrated comprehensive administrative computer system, developed and supported by Quodata of Hartford, Connecticut, to provide much needed improvement in data gathering, budgeting, reporting, and planning capabilities across the institution. The College's small size has allowed it to rely to date almost totally, although not completely satisfactorily, on manual and semi-automated processes. The decision to undertake the conversion to the new system was made recognizing that it would be very demanding of time and resources, but also with the understanding of the necessity of doing so if the College is to manage its operations properly and efficiently. Full implementation of most of the financial modules—general ledger and reporting, student billing, accounts payable, purchase orders—is expected to be completed by the third calendar quarter of 1999, and payroll by the first quarter of 2000. The College also recently completed implementation of the Quodata admissions module, and plans to install student registration within the next 12 months. This Windows-based system is fully Y2K-compliant.

A substantial enhancement is expected in the mechanics and management of financial budgeting, control, and planning once the new computer system is fully implemented. For some time, we have been unable to provide organizational units with data to track budget performance in a timely and efficient manner; general ledger transactions, for instance, have been batch-processed externally and require extensive time and manipulation to be made useful for management information purposes. Most departments, therefore, have maintained their own manual or computer-based budget tracking systems. The new system will eliminate the need for such redundancies and free staff for other productive purposes, as well as provide ready access to current data.

In addition to the new financial reporting system, substantial progress has been made in developing and using computer-based spreadsheets and databases designed to improve specific analytical, budgeting, and planning efforts. These programs will continue to be expanded and enhanced, and their

utility and effectiveness should be significantly augmented when the new system is fully functioning.

Capital Budget

In recent years the College has had to limit capital budget allocations to highest priority needs as part of the effort to conserve resources. Capital expenditures, excluding library books, averaged approximately \$250,000 annually in FYs 1989 through 1998. Approximately half of these expenditures since FY 1995 were invested in expanding the College's computer capabilities. In FY 1998, we entered into a lease arrangement to finance a \$450,000 upgrade in data transmission and telecommunications infrastructure. During the next several years, Bennington expects to make increased infrastructure investments, as well as to undertake substantial renovations in existing physical facilities (e.g., Commons) and new construction (student residences). Undertaking these investments and major projects, however, will be dependent upon gifts and/or long-term financing to fund the full related costs.

Planning Process

Financial planning at Bennington centers in the offices of the president, the vice president for finance and administration, and the dean of the College, in consultation with members of the board of trustees on subjects of institutional importance. The vice president for finance and administration is generally responsible for preparing long-range financial projections, identifying and analyzing institutional financial planning issues, and working with other College constituencies in addressing strategic matters pertinent to their financial and administrative operations. Planning issues are brought to standing or *ad hoc* committees when relevant. Major recommendations and issues are brought to the finance committee of the board and/or the full board for review and decision.

Endowment Funds

Bennington built up a modest endowment fund in the 1980s and early 1990s. While the limited earnings derived from the endowment have not directly or significantly contributed to the College's annual operating and capital requirements, the availability of the endowment funds proved critical to Bennington during the period of greatest financial need in the mid-1990s. As of

June 1999, the endowment was valued at approximately \$9 million, including \$6.5 million due from the College. The board approved a formal investment policy in April 1998. Presently, the invested portion of the fund is heavily weighted in liquid fixed income securities. Other than utilizing the small amount of earnings available for general operating and program purposes, the College does not foresee relying on any additional endowment principal to support cash needs in the future; borrowed funds will be returned to the endowment as cash flow permits.

Fundraising

Fundraising has played a critical role at Bennington during the last decade. Fundraising from all sources contributed 38 percent of the College's aggregate annual budgets over the last five fiscal years. The FY 1999 budget projects total gifts and grants at 31 percent of cash expenditures. As previously noted, over the last five years the College has raised \$30 million in cash and pledges: more than \$17.1 million in major gifts from individuals; \$7.6 million from foundations (compared to \$1.8 million from foundation support in the previous five-year period); and \$5.5 million through the annual fund.

The development office consists of six full-time professionals, one part-time professional, and two support staff members, including the director of development, the director of the 21st Century Fund, and the director of foundation and corporate grants, who report to the president; an associate director of development, an annual fund associate, a research associate, and a database manager.

Bennington directs its fundraising efforts toward fulfillment of institutional objectives and needs established by the board of trustees and president of the College. The College adheres to national fundraising standards for the entirety of its development program. This includes timely and thorough acknowledgment procedures and careful tracking of restricted gifts to ensure that the College fulfills the stated intentions of the donor, if any. The development office has recently installed an updated computer database that has increased speed, accuracy, and flexibility of data input and output. Narrative and financial reports are prepared for both individual and foundation grantors, as required by the terms of specific gifts and grants. The fundraising program includes major individual gifts and bequests, certain types of planned and deferred gifts, foundation and corporate grants, and an annual fund.

Long-Term Debt and Credit Availability

Bennington's capital structure included \$4,780,000 of long-term debt as of fiscal year-end June 30, 1999. Of this amount, \$1,610,000 currently remains outstanding under two tax-exempt bonds issued in 1970 and 1972; these bonds carry a Moody's B2 (with stable outlook) rating, recently upgraded from B3. The College's projections indicate that servicing of these bonds until their respective final maturities in 2000 and 2003, respectively, should be well within our capacity. The \$3,170,000 balance represents the total issued to date under the Bennington Bond, a series of eight-year notes privately placed by the College.

Placement of the Bennington Bond was initiated in May 1997 in an original issue amount of up to \$8,500,000. The primary purposes of the bond were, and continue to be, to provide financing for such cash needs as may not be met by operating and fundraising activities until the College achieves operational financial equilibrium and to provide for capital projects. The placement period has no set expiration date, and may be extended from time to time at the discretion of the board. The bonds carry an interest rate of 10 percent, taxable, and although not incorporated into the College's projections, we anticipate that some investors may wish to donate some portion of interest or principal payments during the life of the bonds. To date, \$250,000 of principal and \$124,000 of interest have been returned to the College as gifts.

As noted, the College currently has two bank credit facilities. The credits—a \$400,000 line and a \$600,000 revolving credit—have not been used since July 1997 and April 1998, respectively. Borrowings under these facilities have a senior security interest in various assets of the College; the College is engaged in discussions with the bank to release certain of these assets. These credits appear adequate to meet the College's periodic future short-term cash needs.

APPRAISAL

Bennington's financial situation has improved markedly in relation to the pressing circumstances caused by the accelerating enrollment declines during the early 1990s that culminated in the bottoming out of the undergraduate

student population in fiscal years 1995 and 1996. The cash deficits incurred during those years posed a major challenge to the College. Bennington was able to manage throughout this demanding period while continuing to implement initiatives to reinvigorate its academic program; but doing so necessitated full use of a limited borrowing capacity and reliance on the College's endowment funds to maintain operations at a viable level.

The College undertook, and continues to carry out, specific actions to reduce the deficits. These include the intensifying of a rigorous cost control program, executing a focused major donor fundraising effort, and administering a targeted reduction in financial aid. These efforts have produced the following results:

- 1) operating expenses were held at a virtually constant level for the seven-year period FY 1992 through FY 1998;
- 2) record fundraising from FY 1995 through FY 1999; and
- 3) the College succeeded in reducing financial aid from a peak of 44 percent to under 36 percent, while simultaneously holding its increase in tuition, room, and board to only 2.3 percent in aggregate over the four years from FY 1995 through FY 1998.

Although incurring deficits totaling \$5,000,000 over fiscal years 1996 through 1997, the College was able to fund these and meet all financial and debt service obligations during this interval through utilization of the previously obtained capital funds and the creation of a new source of long-term debt: the Bennington Bond.

The enrollment resurgence has carried into FY 1999, although a deficit is budgeted for the year, reflecting a planned increase in expenditures. This deficit is being funded through Bennington Bond commitments. The increase in the level of expenditures for FY 1999 reflects management's determination to accommodate important operating and other needs central to the College's carrying out its mission, rather than any relaxation of cost control measures. While Bennington has purposefully continued in the last several years to operate at a level commensurate with a 500-plus undergraduate student population, some expenditures were necessarily postponed to conserve cash. Management and the board now believe that the College can and should take a longer-range view of its expenditure programs, while continuing to exercise a strong cost control orientation.

Bennington's primary economic goal now is to achieve a level of operations that will provide a revenue underpinning adequate to support the

required ongoing investment in academic, human, and physical resources to ensure a thriving institution. Currently, the most important element in accomplishing this goal is the rebuilding of undergraduate enrollment.

Bennington has always been, and continues to see itself as, a small institution. We have set an objective of attaining a minimum undergraduate enrollment of 600 students as the critical step in enabling the College to operate in fully effective academic and financial capacities. Current projections indicate this objective can be achieved in a two- to three-year time frame. In the meantime, increased revenue from expected continued enrollment growth, combined with careful management of financial aid and expense control, should result in decreasing operating deficits and related funding needs. Funding to cover these deficits will depend on future fundraising success, as well as periodic access to institutional and other forms of credit.

Several campus facilities projects are of primary importance to the future of the institution. Most essential at this time is the construction within the next two years of three student residences to accommodate expected increased enrollment above 500 students. The total project cost, including ancillary work, is currently estimated at approximately \$7.7 million. The College now is seeking donor gifts and/or suitable long-term debt to fund the project. Clearly, our preference is to finance this need with outright gifts, but the project is essential to meeting our enrollment and revenue targets, and therefore warrants debt assumption if necessary and available on reasonable terms. The College is proceeding with the architectural planning activities, but construction will not be undertaken until the appropriate financing has been committed or obtained. Other possible projects, such as the renovation of Commons and expansion of the library, will not be undertaken without proper funding.

In overview, to achieve financial stability the College needs to generate about three-quarters of its operating budget from net tuition revenue, compared to the current 50 to 55 percent. A 600-plus undergraduate enrollment and financial aid ratio of 36 percent or less will enable Bennington to effect this relationship. The remaining one-quarter of annual budget needs at such point would be derived, roughly equally, from other income sources, including graduate, other College-sponsored and external programs, and the College's routine annual fundraising activities. Once such a revenue

relationship is established, major gifts, grants, and bequests can be directed fully toward capital projects and endowment repayment.

PROJECTION

As described above, the College's financial health is strategically dependent on the achievement of a 600-plus enrollment level, continued successful fundraising, and ongoing attention to costs.

The College also needs to address a number of financial-related policy, procedural, and operational areas to ensure that we are managing resources in the most efficient and effective manner. Primary among these are:

Financial reporting and control. Reporting and control will be significantly improved upon the full utilization of the new administrative computer system. Completion of the student billing module, installation of the payroll module, and development of basic organizational report capabilities are top priorities, and are scheduled to be accomplished by the end of the first calendar quarter of 2000.

Review of employee benefit programs. The College must review its approach to providing employee benefits with the objective of properly balancing compensation and costs, particularly in relation to increasingly expensive medical insurance premium plans. This will be undertaken during FY 2000, with the objective of recommending a program to the board by the end of the fiscal year.

Business office staffing. The business office needs an additional professional staff member to assume responsibility for day-to-day office procedures, cash management, and general accounting functions, and to facilitate implementation of comprehensive control practices. Currently, the demands of the office are such that not all of these functions and other important analytical and program tasks can be fully managed. A search is underway, and the position will be filled as soon as the appropriate individual is identified.

New student house construction financing. The College presently is seeking long-term debt financing for this project. We expect that financing on acceptable terms will be arranged by September 30, 1999. Should the financing not be finalized or the building permitting process not be completed in time for a late fall 1999 start, the project will be postponed until spring 2000. This

could create difficulties in having adequate housing available for projected fall 2000 enrollment, in which case the College has developed alternate plans.

Practices and procedures. During the last several years, priority has been given to dealing with major financial matters as necessitated by the circumstances of the College. While this was appropriate, doing so resulted in our not being able to devote sufficient time to refining and codifying certain business and personnel policies and procedures (e.g., purchase orders, programs administration, hiring and compensation practices) required to ensure the most efficient operations. Once the business office staffing and administrative computer systems are in place, we will focus on these areas; we anticipate substantial progress in this regard by the end of calendar year 2000.

STANDARD TEN:
PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

Bennington College provides information about mission, objectives, programs, academic structure, policies and procedures, and the activities of students, faculty, staff, and alumni to a number of constituencies, including the general public, prospective students and their parents, alumni, and people currently learning, teaching, and working at the College. Bennington is committed to the highest standards in communicating with its constituencies ethically and accurately, and is responsive to requests from the public, including information about financial matters, in compliance with government regulations.

To improve communications efforts, both internal and external, the communications office merged with the development office in 1996. This reconfigured office of development and communications oversees most aspects of public information for Bennington, including publications for admissions and other offices, alumni publications, and media relations.

In April 1999, the office sent a notice for publication by local and regional media asking for third-party comments in writing concerning the College's qualifications for accreditation. The notice was sent to the *Bennington Banner*, *Rutland Herald*, *Manchester Journal*, *Burlington Free Press*, Vermont Associated Press, and *Williamstown Advocate*, and followed the suggested wording provided by NEAS&C. A similar notice was printed in the March issue of *Bennington*, the alumni magazine. Internal notifications were provided to the Bennington community at intervals by the president's office.

Admissions Publications

In 1995 the admissions office articulated a new mission: "To ensure that from the moment of inquiry on, the student engages in a dialogue with the College that embodies the principles of a Bennington education." As part of the new direction, the office began sending a series of first-contact, "Describe Yourself" mailings designed to begin that dialogue. The College view book, called *Stories*, follows up on the initial contact, and is the primary publication used to convey to prospective students a sense of life and learning at Bennington.

In line with the mission of the College, *Stories* focuses on individual students who have made Bennington's programs and philosophy work for them. The text is composed almost entirely of direct quotes by current students, who describe their challenges, accomplishments, hardships, and joys. In the process they also reveal what is expected of students at Bennington, how the academic planning process operates, and other pertinent information about the College. At the heart of *Stories* is the work of these students, along with the work of alumni, now featured in an expanded final section. The publication contains the commencement statement of the College, which reflects our mission, and the stories within it attempt to reflect those tenets realistically. *Stories* is normally published once every two years.

The curriculum sampler catalog, a companion to *Stories*, outlines Bennington's academic structure and programs; admissions and financial aid policies and procedures; size, setting and physical resources; and information about student services, community life, and security information, in compliance with recently enacted federal regulations. The catalog, published annually, includes a list of current regular and visiting faculty with their biographical data, as well as information on the president and the dean. It also contains descriptions of courses taught over a four-term period (the current and the prior year), with language indicating that the listing is a representative sampling of courses. The College's mission statement is included in the curriculum sampler catalog, and both *Stories* and the catalog include information about Bennington's accredited status. Prior to publication of the catalog each year, all faculty members are asked to update biographical information, and pertinent offices throughout the College are asked to verify and update information. Accepted students receive the full curriculum, which is published by the office of the dean of the College.

The student handbook, published annually by the office of student life and produced by the communications office, also contains Bennington's commencement statement, the First Principles, and extensive information relating to all facets of campus life.

Data about the achievements of graduates highlighted in the "Life After Bennington" section of *Stories* came, in large part, from an in-depth development office questionnaire sent to alumni in 1997 for the 1998 alumni directory. Other sources for information on our alumni include news clips, personal contact, and faculty and staff resources. Among other admissions

publications is a science and math brochure, which also contains information about graduate schools and alumni careers. We regularly showcase alumni achievements in *Bennington* magazine as well, which is sometimes distributed by admissions to prospective students. As is most often the case at Bennington, the success of our graduates is largely communicated not on the basis of statistical data, but through individual stories.

Admissions publications are available for inspection in the workroom.

Public Relations

The communications office is committed to informing the public and prospective students and their parents about the College's programs, faculty, and activities. The office regularly distributes news releases and event invitations to media and contacts editors, news directors, and reporters concerning specific campus events. In recent years College representatives have met with editors and reporters in Vermont, New York, Boston, and Washington, D.C., to discuss Bennington's programs and activities.

As a result of these efforts, the College has been featured in a variety of publications, including *The Boston Globe*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *U.S.A. Today*, and others. In mid-1997, *The Christian Science Monitor* featured a report on a class at Bennington combining the instruction of French and dance. The College has also been featured in articles distributed to media throughout New England by the Vermont Associated Press.

In addition to newspaper coverage, reporting of the College by radio and television has increased. In fall 1996, National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* ran a segment on a student attending Bennington's July Program. *The Chronicle* program, produced by WCVB-TV in Boston, reported on the teaching of Bennington faculty member Mary Oliver in 1998, and College president Elizabeth Coleman appeared on Vermont Public Television's *Talk of Vermont*, also in 1998. In addition, WTEN-TV in Albany, New York, reported on the College's language program in local schools, a *Kids at College* program, and the College's 1996 reunion.

The office responds to media inquiries in a timely way. College events are also regularly publicized through *College Week*, a publication produced each week by the office of student life that is distributed on campus and displayed off campus in many local businesses. *College Week* is available for subscription by the general public at a minimal cost. It was recently redesigned, with the

goal of achieving additional readership among on- and off-campus audiences. The new version is in calendar format, with brief descriptions of events; a separate announcements document is issued bimonthly.

The communications office also maintains and oversees the College's Web site, which has been used to disclose public information. A primary link to the site, "Beyond the Classroom," has links to pages that contain College press releases, an electronic version of *College Week*, a term-long calendar of events, and a reproduction of *SILO*, the student-produced literary and arts publication. The press releases and calendar are updated regularly, *College Week* each week, and *SILO* each spring after the newest version is printed. Each primary page on the Web site also has an e-mail link to the College, "Ask Bennington," which encourages Web visitors to seek any form of public information about the College via e-mail.

The communications office takes an active role in keeping the College community—faculty, staff, students, and trustees—informed of College activities and coverage by media. The office contracts with Luce News clipping service, which provides news clips and electronic media transcripts about Bennington on a regional and national level. Several times a month the latest clips are distributed to senior staff, and once every two to three months, all clips for the period are distributed to students, faculty, staff, and trustees.

Alumni Publications

In the period immediately following the 1994 restructuring, the alumni magazine became a vehicle for institutional rather than alumni news. Instead of informing and engaging alumni, however, this direction led to a decrease in alumni involvement. In response, the publications office talked with a number of alumni informally and included a request for submissions and a reader questionnaire in a 1997 issue. The response rate, though low, confirmed what we already believed: Bennington is, essentially, about work; and our alumni are interested in reading, reading about, and seeing the work of their fellow alumni, current faculty, and students.

For subsequent issues, the alumni magazine, renamed *Bennington*, focused increasingly on the work of alumni, faculty, and students. Recent issues have included work by writer Michael Pollan '76, photographer Maxwell MacKenzie '76, painter Erin Parish '88, writer Donna Tartt '86, Blue Man Group member Chris Bowen '88, novelist Kiran Desai '93, essayist Gretel Ehrlich '67, and

faculty members Ted Hoagland, Mary Oliver, and Stephen Sandy. The more this type of work has been featured in the magazine, the more positive response and involvement alumni have shown.

To ensure timely publication of the growing number of class notes and allow for expanded treatment of feature articles, we changed from three full magazines a year to two, adding two interim publications, called *NOTES*. Meanwhile, the focus on alumni work in *Bennington* required a vehicle to communicate milestones and events in fund raising, capital improvements, and curricular programs. *Development News*, mailed in the spring and fall, addresses this need, as well as including the giving report, usually once a year. Other regular alumni publications include annual fund mailers, invitations to College and regional events, and phonathon flyers. Samples of recent alumni publications are available in the workroom.

APPRAISAL

Admissions Publications

The *Stories* piece engages prospective students in the individual educational processes of some 25 Bennington students. We believe it does so honestly and powerfully. The curriculum sampler catalog provides the background for those individual stories—i.e., these are the tools prospective students can use to shape their own Bennington stories—but feedback received from students suggests that the design is not as accessible and compelling as it might be. The catalog adheres to guidelines established for full disclosure.

Public Relations

The tone of media coverage about Bennington has dramatically changed in recent years. In the early 1990s the College was primarily noted for being “the most expensive college in the nation.” From 1994 to 1996, the restructuring process dominated coverage, which was often uncomplimentary or cautious in reporting the future of the College. All too often, articles focused on faculty contract issues instead of the dynamic ideas that propelled the restructuring. Since 1996, we have made steady strides towards demonstrating, through the media, that Bennington’s curricular changes have revitalized the institution. These proactive efforts have resulted in more consistently positive news coverage. Recent news clip samples are available in the workroom.

To continue improving, we need to promote individual programs more actively and move the concentration away from “after the restructuring” stories. We also need to create a more focused process for conveying Bennington’s story to national media. With Bennington’s student population originating from more than 30 states and several different countries, it is crucial that the College’s programs and faculty activities find a more national forum. Currently, the structure of media relations is being reviewed; we are considering contracting with a media relations specialist for expanding national coverage.

The College’s Web site, while functional, is basic in many ways and lacks a system of maintenance that is ideal for the optimal use of the site. The current site does not adequately reflect the uniqueness of the institution, and lags behind comparable sites technologically and artistically. As the Web site is increasingly a prime recruitment tool, it is critical that we address this issue.

Alumni Publications

Reaction to the new look of the alumni magazine via personal conversation, mail, and email has been positive across the board. We need to continue to look for ways to mine our rich alumni body for stories focused on work.

Combining the offices of development and communications has resulted in a broader base from which to discover these stories. Staff meetings have increased awareness of alumni endeavors, and involving more people in the fact-checking and editing phase of production helps to ensure that the information in the magazine is complete, accurate, and clear.

Tracking of alumni has historically been problematic for the College. Though we have made some improvements—via the alumni directory questionnaire, increased interaction with alumni through research for the magazine, and better coordination of information within the development and communications office—we need to devise an organized, consistent method for tracking and validating alumni achievements.

PROJECTION

Admissions Publications

As of this writing, remedies for the shortcomings in the current curriculum sampler catalog are under discussion. Changes have been made to the 1999-2000 catalog, currently being produced, and improvements in design and organization are planned for the following year. The admissions office will continue to work closely with the dean’s office on this project. Other

admissions publications, including the application, have also been assessed and revised recently to give students a clearer vision of what work at Bennington is like. Assessment of and changes to admissions publications will continue to take place every year, as a matter of routine.

Public Relations

The College's Web site will undergo a major redesign in 1999, with modest but noticeable changes in the interim period. The goal is to make the site more user-friendly and to include new technology and options. Currently, a "Bennington In the News" section is being added to the site, which will contain synopses of newspaper articles featuring Bennington's students, faculty, and alumni.

Alumni Publications

The transformation of the alumni magazine over the past two years has led to a noticeable increase in the amount of editorial copy submitted by alumni for consideration. We are developing editorial strategies to follow through on increased alumni contacts and maintain the content quality of recent issues. We will also seek ways to connect with alumni more systematically, so that the magazine can continue to reflect Bennington's pedagogy by focusing on the work of its community.

STANDARD ELEVEN: INTEGRITY

DESCRIPTION

Bennington's commitment to the fundamental connection between ethics and the educational process is explicitly stated in the first two lines of the statement that has been read at every commencement since its first, in 1936: "Bennington 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...." Respect for the individual and for diversity of opinion is at the heart of Bennington's academic, administrative, and social practices.

In its dealings with students, faculty, staff, external organizations, and the public-at-large, Bennington strives to adhere to the highest standards of integrity and fairness. As stated in Standard Ten, the College carefully and systematically monitors publications and other means of public disclosure to ensure clarity and truthfulness. Publications, in fact, undergo a fairly rigorous approval process within the institution, and are always reviewed by the special assistant to the president, who serves as legal liaison with the College attorney.

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of Bennington's educational philosophy. Since its inception, the College has encouraged faculty members to pursue, as one said some years ago and as College publications have reiterated ever since, "that which keeps us awake at night." Students are asked to pursue the areas that most engage them as well.

In the summer after the 1994 Symposium report was issued, a faculty group met weekly to map out interim strategies for faculty governance. At that time, a number of faculty structures were sketched out, along with policies and procedures. Evolving over the following years were a new faculty leave and sabbatical policy, peer review process, the academic policy committee, faculty grievance policy and procedures, and most recently, an academic freedom policy. The policy, presented to the full faculty in spring 1999 and to the board of trustees in June, is applicable to all who teach at the College and provides a

clear description of rights and responsibilities governing the free expression of ideas, along with procedures for complaints involving questions of academic freedom. All of these materials are available for review in the workroom.

The requirements, academic expectations, guidelines, rules, and regulations for students are published annually in the student handbook, prepared by the student life office and distributed to all students. The handbook, reviewed and revised annually, includes clearly stated policies and procedures relating to privacy rights, non-discrimination, sexual harassment, and the workings of committees set up to handle grievances, including the judicial, administrative review, and sexual harassment hearing committees. In addition, in spring 1999, special awareness sessions on sexual harassment issues were held for all staff, faculty, and students.

A clear explanation of what constitutes academic dishonesty is included in the student handbook under "Academic Ethics," along with an explicit procedure for handling suspected cases of plagiarism. A copy of the student handbook is available in the workroom.

The judicial committee, described fully in the handbook, has jurisdiction over student conduct that violates the tenets of student behavior and threatens the health, well-being, or safety of the College. Student, staff, and faculty members of the committee are trained extensively each year and normally conduct an end-of-the-year review, making recommendations to the student life staff for changes to procedures. The procedures of the administrative review committee, with authority for more serious infringements of College-wide policies, are also clearly delineated in the handbook, as are appeal processes for all disciplinary proceedings.

Faculty and instructional staff contracts, reviewed annually by College counsel, contain the duties and obligations of the job, length of employment, benefits available, and the conditions of employment. Packets with all appropriate policies and procedures are provided for all new faculty upon arrival; when existing policies are revised, they are distributed to the entire faculty. In addition, the dean and associate dean of the College conduct orientation sessions for new faculty prior to the start of each term. Faculty are required to uphold ethical standards in the treatment of human and animal subjects, as outlined by the faculty ethical standards committee. Copies of all pertinent documents are available in the workroom.

The staff handbook, comprehensively revised in 1999 in consultation with the staff association, conforms to state and federal law and describes in detail all employment policies and procedures for applicable exempt and non-exempt staff. It specifies employee rights and the steps the College and employees must follow in grievance and reprimand processes. Handbooks are distributed to all new employees upon hiring; the most recent version, distributed to applicable employees in fall 1999, is available in the workroom. Policies for unionized staff appear in relevant union contracts.

Bennington does not discriminate against applicants or employees on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, place of origin, sexual orientation, or disability. Hiring processes for new faculty are described fully in Standard Five. For most other positions, job openings are posted internally, and if no inside candidates emerge, applications are solicited through advertising on the Internet and in professional journals. Performance evaluations are conducted once a year for support staff; evaluations of professional staff are ongoing throughout the year. The College strives for diversity in its students, faculty, and staff.

Bennington's charter specifies the authority to grant bachelor and master of arts degrees, to grant certification in the postbaccalaureate program, and to authorize licensure in early, elementary, and second education. The College observes the spirit as well as the letter of all obligations set forth in its charter from the state of Vermont, and makes ongoing efforts to notify the community of all applicable legal requirements and standards. Each year the dean's office informs the faculty in writing about current copyright laws and their implications for the College. Designated staff are responsible for obtaining copyright permission for the use of materials in classes.

The College is legally governed by the board of trustees, who are responsible for directing and managing its affairs, funds, and property. The structure of the board is detailed in Standard Three.

In financial matters as well, the College adheres to federal and state regulations. Its IRS Form 990 is available to the public upon request.

APPRAISAL

In the area of sexual harassment prevention, the College held full-scale community workshops in 1999. Although we have provided annual training for sexual harassment hearing committee members and advisors and for house chairs, we continue to seek ways to keep College-wide awareness high on a regular basis. The state and local laws and College's policies regarding alcohol have also been discussed at faculty meetings by the dean and the director of student life, and have been effective in bringing these issues out into the open.

In general, our faculty and student body are well informed about the ethical standards of the College with regard to academic matters. On the rare occasions when incidents of cheating occur, students are confronted by faculty directly, if not by their peers; the dean's office steps in when necessary. Bennington is a place where work is of the utmost value, competition is a fiercely personal matter, and honesty is part of the aesthetic criteria.

With only eight percent of the 1998 entering class composed of students of color and an overall percentage of only five percent, Bennington's record on diversity, though improved from previous years, is not stellar. The diversity that does exist on campus comes through the cultural contributions of international students, the geographic distribution of domestic students, and the spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds of students. Students in the 1998 entering class represented 32 states. International students comprised 10 percent of the entering class in 1998 and 11 percent of the total student population.

PROJECTION

Because of the success of the College's recent sexual harassment awareness program, the dean will devote a larger segment of new faculty orientation to this topic and to local laws and College policy regarding alcohol on campus. The director of personnel and programs will do the same for new employees. During pre-term training for house chairs and in orientation for new students, separate sessions on sexual harassment will be required. Every four years, we will hold a campus-wide awareness program for faculty, staff, and students.

Recognizing a deficiency in the area of diversity, the College is exploring avenues to provide more diversity. The admissions director is working with the Albany, New York school district to develop a cooperative program. Admissions also plans to seek more diversification in international students, since most of

Bennington's come from two countries, Pakistan and India. The office aims to explore ways to recruit students from Central and South America, Eastern Europe, and Africa. Furthermore, we have instituted a new fellowship for Bennington's M.A.T. program that is specifically designed to recruit students from community colleges in inner-cities areas, including New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Because it attracts students from community colleges, the M.A.T. program also brings a diversity of age and life experience to campus. Recently, the state of Vermont has applied for a grant designed to attract minorities to teach in the state's schools; Bennington's M.A.T. program will be integral to that effort.

As we have in the past, the College will continue to evaluate and refine our policies and procedures annually, with the help of legal counsel, to ensure that they continue to reflect the highest possible ethical standards and the mission of the College.

PREFACE

From the time of NEAS&C's focused visit to Bennington in 1996, we have known that a full review would come in 1999. Since we are now in the fifth year following the College's restructuring, it has been particularly instructive to undertake the self-study process.

More than a year ago, President Coleman appointed her special assistant and the associate dean of the College to co-chair the steering committee to prepare for the self study and visit. The co-chairs attended a workshop given by NEAS&C for institutions preparing for an evaluation and another NEAS&C workshop on assessment.

The president also invited representatives from across the College community to sit on the self-study committee. The full committee consists of:

Joan Goodrich, special assistant to the president; Wendy Hirsch, associate dean of the College; Rebecca Godwin, writer; Larry Lee, vice president for finance and administration; Bill Reichblum, dean of the College; Paul Renzi, director of student life and campus services; Andrea Reynolds, assistant director of admissions; Terry Creach, faculty member in dance; Mansour Farhang, faculty member in international relations; Amy Williams, faculty member in music; Allison Ryan '98, trustee; and students Mimi Bradley '00, Garin Marschall '00, and Jenna White '00.

The committee was charged with designing a process for writing the self study that would engage the entire community. To that end, the committee met regularly throughout the year as a group, as well as in smaller configurations. The committee met with Amy Lezberg from NEAS&C shortly before her retirement to discuss general questions about the process of evaluation. In May 1999 the committee met with the chair of the visiting team, Dr. Frances Volkmann, to discuss the upcoming visit.

Several people outside of the committee were asked to draft portions of the self study as appropriate. After the committee reviewed the first draft, it was placed in the library for the entire community to review and make suggestions for revision. An e-mail address was established to facilitate the process. Faculty members were regularly

informed of the progress of the committee at faculty meetings, and the entire campus received two newsletters published by the committee: one in the spring, which contained information about the standards, the committee membership, the time line for the evaluation, and the process for writing the self study; and one in the fall, with an update and details of the team visit. The board of trustees were informed of the progress of the committee throughout the year at quarterly meetings. Alumni were notified in the alumni magazine, and the greater community was notified via press release.

An early draft of the self study was sent to NEAS&C in May. Upon receiving a detailed response from associate director of the Commission Peggy Maki in June, members of the committee worked on clarifications and additions. The co-chairs met with Dr. Volkmann in mid-July to discuss the visit. Revisions to the self study were completed by August 15 in preparation for printing and distribution to the Commission and to members of the visiting team.

Many, many members of the Bennington College community devoted time, energy, and intelligence to this self study; for their generous contribution, we thank them.

