

No. 2

Duplicate

only copy  
archived

THE EDUCATIONAL PLAN FOR  
BENNINGTON COLLEGE

Dec. 1928

Office of Bennington College  
Old Bennington, Vermont

## The Bennington College Plan

In these days a project to establish a new college of liberal arts requires special justification. Although the original proposal to found a woman's college at Bennington, Vermont, coincided with a period of unusual pressure of numbers for entrance to the women's colleges of the Northeast, this fact was considered only as furnishing a favorable opportunity for the new institution, never as an important reason for establishing it. Fortunately the project has escaped falling into the hands of a local group with limited or traditional outlook or coming under the dictation of a single donor with dogmatic conceptions or individual idiosyncrasies.

The plans for the College and the justification for its existence have gradually been taking shape as a result of six years of interviews, conferences, public meetings, and surveys which have brought to a clear focus the insistent need for a new institution such as Bennington proposes to be.

### Need for a New College

The primary demand comes from the so-called progressive schools. In numbers, support, and prestige these institutions represent a formidable movement in American education. Starting a generation or more ago as a philosophy and a faith they have received support in many of their chief features from the scientific analysis and measurement of school processes which have been going on throughout the same period. These studies have demonstrated the enormous differences in both ability and taste between individual students, and the wisdom of taking account of this fact in our schools; they have shown experimentally that the older formal subjects of study do not possess inherent or superior disciplinary values over newer subjects; they have made clear that learning proceeds most efficiently when illuminated by meaning and motivated by interest. We are approaching a period when the whole progressive school program is certain to receive more of this impartial evaluation with the view to the extension into general school practice of as much of it as is valid.

In this situation, however, progressive schools find themselves severely handicapped. Their program can proceed in any thoroughgoing fashion only up to the point where the college reaches down with its formal admission requirements; from that point on the progressive schools are bound to modify their curricula in the interest of their students' immediate future. Yet the spirit and method of these schools, if valid, should have their most striking justification in the college and university. The aim to produce permanent habits of self-dependence, responsibility in intellectual work, and powers of honest artistic expression can be tested only by its continuance through the period of higher education. There is needed then at least one college, with ample funds and high grade teaching personnel, which by the nature of its entrance requirements, will leave the schools free to teach what they deem best, and which in its own program will emphasize the fact of individual differences, of serious interest as motivation, and of initiative and self-dependence as educational aims.

This does not necessarily mean that such a college should limit itself to the graduates of progressive schools or adopt uncritically progressive school technique. Indeed a surprising interest

and support for such a new college for women have come from the heads of traditional schools who see the need of better advanced instruction and of more individually discriminating entrance requirements for students of specialized abilities. In a very real sense the Bennington project is fashioned out of the demands coming from an active, influential minority among parents and teachers in all kinds of schools.

Bennington College is, then, an experiment in college education. Although piecemeal change can be, and is being, made in existing institutions the commitments of tradition, the vested interests and conflicting purposes of the existing faculty groups, are a distant hindrance to a clean-cut, purposeful program. To bring about changes of a significant nature involving the creation of a new spirit or attitude among students and faculty new institutions with a staff recruited for the purpose have often been necessary - from kindergarten right through the graduate school. It is a thoroughgoing experiment in the college field which is now especially needed.

Although most of the features of the Bennington program described below have been suggested by some specific school or college experience they represent in their entirety not a mosaic but a consistent plan presenting to the students a unique opportunity. Briefly, Bennington says to girls in all types of schools: Have you serious interest and real ability in one of the four great fields of human achievement in which we offer instruction? If so you may enter with us upon a period in which you may test that interest in the light of other interests while we test your ability. If your competence is proved and your interest is sustained you may go ahead in your field of choice under careful guidance as far and as wide and as deep as possible. No traditional bars of formal requirements or rules of residence will stand in the way of your getting the best instruction. No satisfaction of rules of class attendance, reading specified books, or accumulating course credits will help you. Your degree will be given on the basis of a demonstration that you have learned how to stand on your own feet and to work with skill and understanding in your chosen field.

Nowhere in the colleges of this country is this particular program being carried out; nor could it be without a virtual internal revolution. Only a new college with adequate resources, built from the ground up on the basis of these ideas, can conduct such an experiment with the freedom and unified purpose which it demands. The mechanical features of the program are outlined below.

### Admissions

The object of the admissions system is to discover and to admit young women of serious interest and of unusual promise in one or more of the four major fields: literature, the fine arts, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. They are not to be found in any one type of school, one part of the country, or one group in society. Fortunately the tentative experiments of those colleges which, since the War, have introduced the system of selective admissions and the scientific studies of the problem\* indicate that the

---

\*Studies of results of various admission devices made at the University of Minnesota and Stanford University.

best prediction of success in college work is the quality of work done in the schools. Furthermore it is now clear that no one impersonal test or set of tests can wisely be used as a means of selecting the most promising candidates for college entrance. Consequently Bennington will assign to an expert director of admissions the task of selecting the entrants to its Freshman Class upon the basis of the following: (a) quality of the school record; (b) score on scholastic aptitude tests and, if desirable, where the school's standard of grading is unknown, examination on one or two subjects in which the student has done considerable work; (c) evidences of purpose, ambition, range of interests, traits of character and personality as obtained from the candidates out-of-school record, personnel rating blanks, written appraisal from school officials, and, wherever possible, a personal interview with the candidate.

No student will be admitted merely on school certificate or because she has passed formal examinations in a standard group of courses. On the other hand, no student will be prevented from entering Bennington merely because she has not succeeded in any single subject such as Latin or Mathematics or French. Traditional bars will be replaced by realistic ones no less severe but allowing expert individual discrimination. Evidences of serious purpose and interest, and special aptitude in one line will give a girl preference over another whose record may be more uniform but less promising from the standpoint of the objectives of the College.\*

#### The Financial and Scholarship System

The admissions system is aimed not merely at cutting off the least qualified candidates at the bottom of the list of applications. Bennington will seek positively to attract girls of initiative, independence, maturity, and stirring ambitions. Its peculiar financial system makes possible the use of scholarships for this purpose.

In the existing colleges all students - rich and poor, promising and unpromising - are given what is in effect a scholarship in the form of a tuition charge covering only one-third to one-half of the actual cost of instruction. Under the Bennington plan students will be charged as tuition their full share of the current instruction cost. As a necessary corollary scholarships must be provided to defray part or all of the tuition cost for those who need, and deserve, such pecuniary aid. But the usual method of semi-annual scholarship awards is inappropriate. Students of limited means, especially girls whose opportunities for self help and later remunerative employment are much more limited than is the case with boys, will not enter in any numbers a college whose tuition fee is twice that at other reputable institutions, with only the knowledge that later a scholarship may reduce the charge. The Bennington plan, is, therefore, to award scholarships to prospective students carefully selected for their promise of distinguished college success. The understanding at the time of award is the same as that of the Rhodes Scholarships: namely that the original selection implies the renewal of the scholarship

---

\*This admission system is unique among Eastern colleges. Stanford University and Reed College have introduced its main elements with distinct success.



during the undergraduate's three succeeding years unless her grade of work proves unsatisfactory.

For a large proportion of the scholarships there will be an award on a selective regional basis. The country will be divided into twelve natural regions in each of which a scholarship of \$1000 (sufficient to cover full tuition charges and travelling expenses from any part of the country to Bennington) will be awarded every year. In each region a committee of educators and laymen will be organized to make the annual nomination. The actual award will be made by the College Director of Admissions. The regional committees will naturally be interested in discovering young women of unusual ability. In this they will be aided by teachers and other workers with girls in almost every community, who will take a genuine pleasure in seeking out girls of demonstrated talent and urging them to apply for nomination as regional scholars.

That many young women would welcome such an opportunity there is little doubt. Studies such as that of the High School Seniors in Massachusetts\* indicate that with all the opportunity for the discovery and development of unusual talent implied in our free school system there is an appreciable number of young people of excellent minds who, for economic reasons, do not go to college at all. More commonly young people of limited means do go to college but to a nearby local institution with meagre equipment and mediocre faculty rather than to the institution which their talents deserve. Selective four-year scholarships will open up to some of these young people of unusual competence and limited means the opportunity for individual attention, with close faculty contacts, wider horizons and stimulation resulting from association with students from other parts of the country with high standards of achievement. If successful in practice it will lead to a more general adoption of scholarships as a means of discovery and selection of gifted students.

#### Curriculum: The First Two Years

The Bennington plan sets clearly before the student at entrance a single purpose: the discovery for herself of the field in which she possesses a lasting interest and a distinct competence. In general, this is the task of the first two years.

A first principle of the College, however, is the recognition of the very real differences between individual students in previous work, in maturity, and in essential purposes. Some students there will be who at entrance know perfectly well what they want to do and have good reasons for doing it. Others will have temporary enthusiasm, preferences, and aversions based upon inadequate school experience. Still others, although of good general intellectual ability, will as yet have shown no well defined purposes, interests, or

---

\*By Dr. McPhail of Brown University; published by the U.S. Bureau of Education.

preferences. A first two years of work required of all these students would do violence to the immediate educational needs of a large proportion of them. Consequently the Bennington curriculum for this period will be individually prescribed by deliberate conference between college officers and students rather than generally required. This must not be interpreted to mean an unrestricted elective system; each arrangement is to be based on a careful analysis of the school experience and the necessary requirements for later college work in the field of the student's choice.

There will be a general pattern of work designed to be of direct value in helping the undergraduate to discover her main intellectual or aesthetic interest and talent. A course in each of the four main fields will be given in the first and second years. The work already done in some of the colleges under the heading of orientation courses will be of help in understanding their purpose. But the common mistake of such courses in missing the essential method in a field of study by providing an extensive and cursory survey of a vast body of knowledge will be avoided. The exact content and method of the Bennington introductory courses can be defined only after the instructors have worked out their joint program. But all will be designed to satisfy the aims of the undergraduate's work of the first two years; that of discovery of intellectual and aesthetic interests, and proof of degree of ability in the field of interest. Consequently each course must be so conducted as to reveal the essential method of working in that particular field. In the sciences this means the laboratory method; in fine arts, creation or expression as well as appreciation; in literature, the understanding of great masterpieces rather than detailed, superficial, literary history; in the social studies the careful, intensive and impartial analysis of contemporary problems. Secondly, the course must have a content carefully selected to reveal the significance of work in the particular field. Its content must be a representative sample rather than an encyclopedic survey. The science courses must not be deadened by routine work of a purely preparatory nature. By adhering carefully to the main objects as defined by the need of the students and with a staff selected with the object of cooperating in the preparation and revision of their content and method, it is reasonable to expect that the results will be of distinct value not only to Bennington undergraduates but to other institutions working on the same problem. In most cases the content of a year's course will cover more than one academic department of knowledge. After trial, however, it may seem best in the sciences, for instance, to maintain a sequence of semester courses such as geology, biology, physics, and chemistry.

In the work of both years an effort will be made, so far as practicable, to correlate the four courses round a cultural epoch. Thus it is planned to have the general subject of the first year an attempt to understand modern western civilization - its economic and scientific basis, its literature, and its art. In such a program there are possibilities of breaking down barriers not only between departments but between fields of knowledge, and between curriculum and extra-curriculum.

In addition to the two year program of four courses a year there will be the equivalent of a fifth course called the trial major

conference. This is an informal group attached to each of the introductory courses consisting of those students intending to major in the field represented by the course. Here the underclassman will pursue work differentiated from that done by those taking the introductory course for exploratory purposes. It will serve directly as a preparation for the more individual and informal methods characteristic of the last two College years.

Other course will be offered during the first two years. "Tool courses" such as mathematics and the foreign languages will be available for those who are planning to do advanced work which requires their use. The command of written and spoken English is, of course, an essential in all branches of college work. At Bennington, however, this training will not be carried on as a separate course but by tutorial or conference methods in connection with the material of other courses. For students whose secondary school work in any field makes unnecessary the general introductory courses, and who do not need any special "tool courses", advanced courses will be made available.

#### Curriculum: Entrance to the Senior Division

The test for passage from the Junior Division (first two years) of the College to the Senior Division (last two years) will be simple and definite. It will depend not at all upon the accumulation of a certain number of credits or "grades" but solely upon clear evidence of distinct ability in one of the four major fields. Failure to do satisfactory work in one or more courses outside of the field of the student's choice will not disqualify or delay a student. The object of the introductory courses is the exploration and discovery of interest and competence. That object is attained as much by failure as by success. Unless, of course, a student does distinctly creditable work in at least one course during the first year, and unless she meets the obligation of effort required by her instructors she will be liable to be asked to leave College.

Entrance to the Senior Division for some students may come at the end of the first year. The College will be interested in the kind of cooperation with secondary schools which, by providing an earlier orientation, will make this possible. Again, there may be students who because of a false start, delayed maturity, or for other reasons will need and will desire a third year in the Junior Division in order to prove their capability and to make certain of their interest in a major field. No objection will be made to this plan so long as the two year record indicates likelihood of real success in the third year. This will naturally not affect the usual requirement of two years in the Senior Division before the award of the degree.

What percentage of the student body will be eliminated by the test for entrance to the Senior Division cannot be foretold. The admission system is designed to attract the girl whose record and attitude give promise of demonstrating competence in a major field. Every student from the day she enters will know that it is her responsibility to find her interest and prove her ability if she is to remain in college beyond the first two years.

The courses as well as the methods will be directed towards assisting her in her quest. It is not unlikely, therefore, that as large a proportion of students will qualify for advanced work as at existing colleges where progress depends upon the amassing of course credits. In any case a system which permits students without a definite intellectual interest and real ability to proceed to advanced work is a waste and misdirection of energy for all concerned.

### Curriculum: The Last Two Years

The work of the Senior Division need not be described in detail. It will be for all students similar in nature to the honors work now arranged for selected students in some of our better colleges. Every student will be enrolled directly under the supervision of the instructor or instructors in the field of her choice. Although the precise method will vary with the major chosen, in almost all cases it will be characterized by informal group conferences meeting weekly rather than by daily classroom assignments. There will be individual assignments or projects involving continuous periods in the laboratory, studio, library, or field, checked by faculty supervision. This is not only an effectual way of doing advanced work but is a means of promoting self-dependence, activity, and initiative in intellectual or artistic work - primary aims of the College.

The field of major interest in practically every case will be broader than a single academic department. Bennington has no sympathy with the false antithesis between vocational and liberal education. Important adult activities, whether vocational or avocational, will be made the basis of the student's major activity. The older professions, public affairs and international relations, the fine arts, child development, are examples of fields of concentration. Every one of these requires breadth of background, a liberal outlook, and a thorough preparation rather than the narrow, trade-school training which is often associated with vocational work.

A student who wishes to follow interests entirely outside her major during the last two years will be encouraged to do so. Especially will it be the aim to develop an ability to promote the habit of self direction by individual reading or personal activity rather than by taking a formal course. The common life of discussion among upperclass students with different major interests will give constant encouragement to the broadening of intellectual and aesthetic interests.

A small residential college with easy opportunity for individual attention is the most favorable atmosphere for the early years of college designed to lay foundations and to awaken intellectual interests. In the advanced work requiring specialized library, laboratory, and instruction facilities no small, independent institution can compare with the great metropolitan university, artistic, and intellectual centers. Bennington College, recognizing this fact, will make use of non-resident facilities for advanced work whenever this will best serve the student's education rather than attempting futile competition with them.



The college calendar is a first means to this end. In addition to a two months' summer vacation there will be a winter recess extending from Christmas through Washington's birthday. For both faculty and students this will provide an opportunity for travel and for participation in metropolitan life at its most active period.

During the last two years those students who need facilities the College cannot in and of itself offer in order to explore their special fields will be encouraged to go to centers which afford the necessary facilities to continue their major work under the general supervision of the College. This plan will apply to those who need laboratory research facilities offered by certain universities, those who wish to study national and international affairs in such centers as Washington, London, and Geneva, those who desire to study foreign languages and literature abroad, or to gain access to the leading centers of art and music. In many cases, probably in a majority, the facilities and staff at Bennington will be such that the student will continue in residence the whole of the last two years. The utmost flexibility in making the best individual arrangements will be allowed. In all cases the non-resident work will be under the supervision of the Bennington faculty. It will always bear a direct relation to the plan of study for the Bennington degree.

Some students may prefer to effect a complete transfer to another institution to receive the degree from it rather than from Bennington. In such cases no objection will be raised. Until existing universities, however, allow much more freedom in curricular requirements for transferred students it can seldom be arranged with any degree of satisfaction to the students themselves. To make it easier to accomplish a successful transfer at the end of two years, Bennington would have to revise its curriculum so that its students could meet a host of formal, traditional requirements made by other undergraduate institutions. This would strike at the heart of the College's fundamental educational program. If the Junior College and university reorganization movements eventually make such undergraduate transfer mechanically easy, Bennington will be in a position to reconsider its relation both to the schools and to the universities.

The Bennington degree will be awarded as the result of examinations, theses, or other objective tests designed to reveal the attainment of the student in the field of major study.

### Community Life

A city university attended largely by day-students may justifiably limit its responsibilities to the primary intellectual activities connected with the curriculum. But a residential college today cannot ignore the fact that it is an organized community rather than a place of classrooms, laboratories, and libraries only. For good or ill within its walls young people are acquiring habits of play as well as of work; they are modifying their modes of conduct, making fundamental mental and emotional adjustments, absorbing new attitudes, ideals, and appreciations.



Until the last generation college faculties have held aloof from this student life outside of the classroom. But the elaborate structure of the extra curriculum has so profoundly affected the curriculum that it has now had to be reckoned with. The attempt of existing institutions, however, to bring about a reorganization of "student activities" so that the various elements in the actual life of the community will tend to promote sound educational aims meets with the greatest difficulty. Not only the traditional faculty attitude but the prejudices and vested interests of student groups and embattled alumni present almost insuperable obstacles to significant improvement.

Here, probably more than in the case of curriculum and method, is a unique opportunity for a new college. Bennington intends to take full advantage of it. Much in the student-made curriculum is a crude response to real educational needs for activity and purposeful effort neglected by the faculty-made curriculum. By recognizing the value of purposeful activity, by making curriculum work more informal, by basing the student's tasks upon her fundamental ambitions and interests, by recognizing the fine arts as an important part of the educational program, Bennington will do much towards destroying the gap now lying between student and faculty purposes. The athletic, dramatic, musical, publication, religious, and self-government enterprise of undergraduate life will, by intelligent guidance at the outset, be incorporated into the main intellectual and artistic program sponsored by the faculty. Trivial and imitative student organizations will probably be proposed; but if they do not fall of their own weight they can be effectively discouraged before they become fatally imbedded in institutional tradition.

Student social organizations, the cause of much trouble in educational institutions because of their snobbishness and competitive struggles for a meretricious prestige, will be created at Bennington as parts of a rational living and eating arrangement provided for all of its students. The plan is an innovation in this country although it resembles that of the hostels connected with the new English universities. Groups of approximately forty girls will occupy college houses, each student being assigned to one as her four-year residence. In every house one or more selected faculty members will live, entirely free from custodial or disciplinary duties. Each hall will also have associated with it a number of other faculty members not resident in it. In time there will emerge a number of corporate groups with their own alumnae and traditions. In the life of the hall there will be opportunity for education in self-government, in group budgeting, household management, and household hygiene.

#### Personnel Work

With the small size of the college body, the informal conference method of instruction, and means of regular contact between faculty and students, there will be an enlarged opportunity for personnel work. Heretofore this term has been used for the activities of an expert staff dealing with individual students. It has developed most extensively in large institutions where mass instruction has cried out for such individualization of the educational

process. The small college has not often taken advantage of its superior opportunities for this kind of service. At Bennington, however, not only will there be expert staff guidance in the physical, mental, and emotional problems of the individual student but an attempt will be made to gain, through understanding of the students as a group, a greater insight into the primary educational problems of college youth.

The tastes, manners, morals, and ideals of modern youth have become the subject of a veritable mythology. It is time that they became the subject of intelligent, patient, and impartial analysis. The environment of the young woman today with its secularization of authority in manners and morals, its exciting and sophisticated means of entertainment, its standardization and its recurrent change, has formed an educational influence which we older people do not really understand. By the utilization of all its resources of student-faculty contact Bennington will engage upon the task of understanding its undergraduates. On the basis of this understanding it will provide a continuous criticism of its own educational program, and keep its feet planted upon the ground.

#### The Faculty

A faculty for an institution such as Bennington proposes to be is easy to describe but difficult to secure. Its members must be recruited largely from among the younger members of the profession who possess vital interest and thorough knowledge of their subjects, their students, and the problems of modern education, and who are fitted specifically to contribute towards the development of the Bennington educational program.

The College will reverse the usual order of determining faculty salaries by first fixing a salary scale based upon existing data regarding the academic standard of living and placing the tuition charges at an amount sufficient to cover them. If the salaries prove inadequate the tuition will be raised. Experiment at the outset will be made with the adjustment of the salary to actual family needs (the family allowance system) which is especially applicable to women's colleges and has proved successful in practice (at Wells College).

Although extreme care will be taken in original appointments, mistakes are bound to occur. Consequently all first appointments will be made either to the lower grades where there is a one year or three year tenure; or if to the professorial grade, an arrangement will be made for a three year appointment before promotion is made to indefinite tenure. Permanent tenure in the full professorial rank can not wisely be dispensed with. But every effort will be made to make an intelligent, rigid selection of those who are to be promoted. It will be the special task of the President, aided by a capable faculty committee, to make a careful scrutiny of the teaching effectiveness of the faculty with a view to discriminating decisions in the matter of all reappointments and promotions.

The long winter recess, the provision for sabbatical leave, and the educational investigation fund described below, by offering

opportunity for travel and freedom for independent work, should contribute to the continuous intellectual growth of faculty members.

The task of securing and keeping really gifted teachers of undergraduates is fundamental to the Bennington program. Since the attainment of the Ph.D. degree has proved in practice to be an irrelevant standard for determining teaching effectiveness it will not be used as a basis either for appointment or promotion.

### Flexibility

Institutions have too often begun well abreast of current educational thought and practice only to become in time stupidly complacent and set in their ways. Bennington is seeking all available means to avoid stagnation, to test its original hypotheses and to revise its program in the light of actual experience. Machinery designed to facilitate flexibility and an experimental attitude has been adopted as follows:

(1) All of the trustees are elected for a seven year term, two retiring each year. The tradition of replacement at the end of a single full term has already been established.

(2) The President's resignation is in the hands of the Trustees to take effect seven years after the date of his appointment. An advisory committee of outside experts will survey the College and report to the Trustees shortly before they act on the reappointment of the President. By these and other careful arrangements the selection of a successor at this or any succeeding seven year period can be made without embarrassment.

(3) The College proposes to establish a fund, the annual income of which will be \$7500, for investigations in the field of higher education for women. The annual award of the fellowship under the fund may be made either to a member of the Bennington faculty or to an outside expert. Normally it would be used for the investigation of a specific problem arising directly in connection with Bennington. It will provide the kind of thorough study necessary for the successful inauguration of educational experiments and the scientific evaluation of their results in actual operation.

(4) In order to aid the President, trustees, and faculty to keep in touch with the non-academic centres of thought and movement in the various professional and scientific fields with which the College is concerned the President is empowered to appoint advisors to be consulted especially on matters of general policy. The following are some of the fields in which advisors are being selected: the fine arts, music, drama, journalism, vocations for women, natural sciences, medicine and hygiene, law, architecture, and religious education.

### The Financial Situation

The establishment of the College will require \$4,000,000: \$2,000,000 for buildings, grounds, and original equipment; \$1,350,000 for scholarship funds; \$650,000 for general endowment, the income of which will be used for the annual purchase of library books, the fund for educational investigations, and for a contingency fund.

An adequate campus, including a president's house and a faculty club, has been donated. During the past four years funds totaling \$995,000 have been contributed, for the most part in pledges conditioned on securing a total of \$2,500,000 by December 31, 1930. For the complete establishment of the College new contributions of \$3,000,000 are needed.

If the aim were merely to meet a local demand there would be a temptation to begin operations with a limited and partial program with the hope of later gifts to finance the institution adequately. The Bennington project, however, is fashioned in definite response to the general need for a thoroughgoing experiment in higher education along modern lines. To handicap it at the outset with insufficient funds is to destroy its very reason for being.

With the \$4,000,000 in hand or in sight the College will be free for a generation to give its undivided attention to the main educational task for which it exists. This task is a qualitative one, to be undertaken with a small student body. There will consequently be no need or desire for quantitative growth. The buildings will be adequate for a generation. Under the financial policy of meeting costs of instruction through tuition the College will not need to appeal for additional funds for operating expenses. The single financial problem is, therefore, obtaining gifts of an amount totaling \$3,000,000 in order to build the buildings and to establish scholarships. A few generous gifts at the present time will be decisive as to the date of opening. Each gift will contribute directly to the enhancement of the value of the hundreds of millions of dollars already invested in American college education.

### Summary Statement

The especial features of the Bennington College program are as follows:

1. Selective plan of admission on basis of entire school record, with special attention to quality of work done. No requirement of specific school subjects to be submitted by examination or certification.
2. Tuition to pay for full cost of instruction with generous scholarships for those who need and deserve them.
3. Selective regional scholarships awarded on a four year basis to prospective students of unusual promise.
4. Individual prescription rather than general requirement or free election of work of first two years, taking full account of courses taken in school and of individual differences in development.
5. Two year sequence of introductory courses designed to show the significant content and the particular method in each of the major fields of work.
6. Preparation during the first two years for informal and individual methods by membership in a trial-major conference group.
7. Prescription of tool courses such as mathematics and modern languages not for all but only for those who look forward to major work requiring their use.
8. Advancement from Junior Division (first two years) to Senior Division (last two years) only upon giving clear evidence of distinct ability and of serious interest in one of the major fields.
9. No advancement or award of degree through mere accumulation of grades or passing of a number of courses.
10. Work of the last two years for all in a chosen field of major interest similar in method and aim to honors work now given selected students in several institutions.
11. Opportunity to follow side interests through individual work rather than through attendance upon courses, thus definitely training for intellectual self-dependence.
12. A winter recess allowing students and faculty opportunity for the educational advantages of travel and of metropolitan life.
13. Provision for non-resident work in university and other centers during last two years whenever facilities for advanced work are more favorable than at Bennington.
14. Active support of student activities of value intellectually or in artistic expression and limitation of campus organizations to such activities.
15. Small student house groups for all as centers of social life, informal education, and faculty-student contacts.
16. Continuous utilization of unusual resources of faculty-student contact for more accurate and thorough diagnosis of the real educational needs of modern undergraduates.
17. Adjustable and ample faculty salaries, rigid system of selection for promotion and reappointment, to avoid dead wood in full professorial rank and to correct mistakes made in original selection.
18. Determination to establish and to maintain the College as an experiment in college education with special provision for election of President and Trustees, faculty investigation funds, and continuous non-academic advice, designed to promote flexibility and rigid self criticism.



QUOTATIONS FROM EDUCATORS INDICATING NEED OF EXPERIMENT  
IN THE COLLEGE FIELD

"I regard our period as one in which every serious educational experiment deserves encouragement. We are all feeling our way in educational matters and thoughtful variations of accepted practice are indispensable if we are really to make progress."

- James Rowland Angell, President of  
Yale University

---

"In this day of scrutiny of educational methods every well considered experiment should be encouraged."

- Livingston Farrand, President of  
Cornell University

---

"As things stand today, it might seem wiser economy to leave the existing institutions to maintain their traditional type of liberal education ... and to try bolder innovations... in new institutions created for the purpose. Those who have had experience with the conservatism of college faculties will see other reasons for this policy."

- William A. Neilson, President of  
Smith College

---

"We are rejoiced at the possibility... of the foundation of a new endowed college for women at Bennington, Vermont. If its promise proves good we shall welcome it as European veterans welcomed fresh American troops in some hard pressed corner of the fighting line in France."

- Marion E. Park, President of  
Bryn Mawr College

---

"The project for the establishment of a new college for women at Bennington should command the support of all friends of college education in the East, as it commands the good wishes and the enthusiastic interest of those who are professionally responsible for the higher training of women."

"The colleges of the country are over crowded. Nearly all the strong endowed institutions have been obliged to limit the number of students they will receive. Most of them are already forced to turn away each year many fully qualified applicants for admission. State and city institutions which derive their resources from public funds are able to expand more speedily. But all over the country these institutions have become so large that

the maintenance of the intimacy of association which is an important factor in the educational process is attended with great difficulties."

"There are other reasons, however, why those engaged in the work of higher education will welcome the new foundation with enthusiasm. College education stands in need of radical improvement. The experience of the last twenty years, re-enforced by scientific inquiry, points to many departures from traditional lines of procedure, in the organization of teaching materials, in methods of instruction, and in the guidance of individual students. Still more clearly this experience reveals the desirability of further experimentation. Great changes have taken place in the practices of the older colleges. But the momentum of an established institution and the force of its traditions present serious obstacles to any thorough going reform. A new and plastic institution, if it is deliberately organized to do so and intelligently directed from the start, may at once put into operation those measures that others have discovered to be efficacious, but are unable to adopt in their entirety. It may also carry forward with greater freedom the work of experimentation."

"The Bennington College project has been painstakingly matured with precisely these purposes in view. The Board of Trustees has studied every significant phase of the progressive movement in college education. It has assembled for the guidance of the College staff, when appointed, as complete information as possible concerning all recent successful innovations. At each stage in the development of the plan it has sought the best expert advice. Rarely has an institution been more carefully conceived. College teachers and administrators everywhere are therefore eagerly awaiting the beginning of this unusual and promising venture. They look to it to make a constructive contribution towards the solution of some of the vital problems of higher education."

- Samuel Capen, Chancellor,  
University of Buffalo

---

"I have just read the Prospectus of Bennington College which your office was kind enough to send me with great interest and much satisfaction. Your plans seem to me decidedly promising, and if adhered to with such modifications as time may show to be necessary, without sacrificing the principles on which your whole scheme is founded, sure to yield results of incalculable value not only for the students of Bennington College but for higher education everywhere."

- Paul H. Hanus,  
Professor of Education, emeritus,  
Harvard University