BENNINGTON COLLEGE

Self-Study

in preparation for the

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

of the

New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The self-study committee was appointed by President Coleman in June of 2007. The committee, chaired by the provost and dean, included members of the senior staff, administrators, faculty, and a student. Members of the senior staff were responsible for coordinating the work on particular Standards. As positions shifted or new hires were made, those people were incorporated into the team. We asked a first-year student to serve on the committee in the hopes of that he could provide a consistent presence and perspective throughout the process. A faculty member served as editor.

Staff and faculty attended the various workshops lead by NEASC to orient themselves to the new Standards and familiarize themselves with the overarching goals and processes. The provost and dean charged the self-study team with using the accreditation visit to ask our own questions, chief among them: How could we take advantage of this opportunity to focus our thinking, prompt rich discussions, and move forward on current or emerging priorities?

Toward this end, the team divided into subcommittees with designated leaders to draft each Standard chapter. Each smaller group met as needed over the course of the process and consulted widely with other colleagues as the drafts developed. The entire committee met regularly, but much of the work was done in small settings with drafts shared more widely for comment. Once a complete draft was written, it was shared with the entire community for comment. Later revisions were also shared with the community for comment (available in the library, online, and by hard copy). Over the two-year process, the provost and dean reported on the progress of the team to the board, faculty, staff, and students and invited further participation. In mid-2009, we requested third-party comments through local and regional media; another notice of request for comment was printed in the alumni magazine in early 2009.

Louise Zak, Associate Director of the Commission, met with the self-study team in May of 2008. She later read a draft of the self-study and offered valuable comments. We also shared the draft with the visiting team chair, Dr. Thomas Hochstettler, in preparation for his April 2009 visit to campus. As needed, we consulted with NEASC experts in assessment to clarify and develop our responses to the new series of forms.

The self-study represents the research, planning, thinking, and writing of many individuals. As with any major project, certain individuals worked tirelessly to coordinate a complex task and offer invaluable support and insight. The College extends its deepest gratitude to the community for its efforts. We have learned a great deal during this process and appreciate the thoughtfulness with which the entire community has engaged and responded. We take pride in our collective effort.

OVERVIEW

For more than seventy-five years, Bennington has remained wholeheartedly committed to the mission and purposes envisioned by our founders, based on the belief that the most compelling education is one that students actively shape themselves. The paradox of that steady commitment is that the College's philosophy contains within itself a kind of restlessness, a perpetual propensity for reflection and renewal. Just as we have continually confronted the inherent tension between our students' self-directed and reflective processes and the role of the individual in a larger social community, so too have we worked as an institution to balance stability with relentless innovation. Just as our students' academic plans formulate and reformulate in a constant state of strengthening and refining that engenders their intellectual and personal growth, so too does the College continue to evolve. Maintaining that delicate balance—whether in our own strategic planning or in each student's individual plan of study—remains a central challenge.

Bennington's tendancy historically has been to highlight the more intangible side of that equation. We have often relied upon anecdotal evidence—stories about the achievements of students and alumni, for example—to validate our successes. Recently, though, with the founding mission and purposes as our touchstone, we have taken on the hard work of reinforcing fundamental institutional and academic structures. The 1994 Symposium began the process of making the College at once more resilient and more vibrant. In the five years since the 2003 interim self-study, we have continued to assess and take action. The work we have taken on includes initiating a five-year strategic plan, strengthening the student Plan and faculty review processes, implementing the most successful fundraising campaign in the College's history, attending to long-overdue building and grounds maintenance, building a technological infrastructure, regaining our competitive market position, instituting systematic assessment programs, and bolstering student support systems at all levels. We are also working towards improvement in two key areas: retention and diversity. At the same time, we have begun seeking ways to connect Bennington more centrally to the world, with a vigorous focus on civic education and involvement that we expect to galvanize the College's academic and institutional future.

Attention to planning has played perhaps the largest role in Bennington's positive progress since the last self-study. One key element of the College's quest for continued stability is the long-term strategic plan now being developed and implemented by senior administrative staff. The plan focuses on four key areas: mission and market position, enrollment management, institutional infrastructure, and asset and revenue management. Another element, inextricably connected, is our strengthened commitment to using internal and external tools for research, assessment, and planning. Clear examples of this commitment include the creation of a long-anticipated position of associate provost to centralize those efforts; another is our greatly expanded participation in national research surveys, in addition to the internal gathering and evaluating of qualitative information.

Since the 1999 comprehensive self-study, Bennington's financial position has improved dramatically. Net assets grew from $7.9 million to $63.8 million; full-time undergraduate enrollment increased from 400 to 613, while maintaining or increasing academic quality; private giving now averages a little more than $8 million annually. This past year, as the national economic crisis unfolded, and as Bennington saw its modest endowment and other investments suffer the same fate as other colleges and universities, Bennington was able, once again, to raise more than $8 million. We are also facing a significant increase in financial aid need from incoming and current students for the coming academic year. To meet these short-term needs and to assure our long-term financial stability, the College instituted a targeted salary freeze, as well as significant operating budget reductions for the 2010 fiscal year.

While the current economic climate has slowed Bennington's fiscal growth trajectories, it has not slowed our student recruitment efforts. In fact, this year the College will reach a record enrollment of 650 undergraduates and 210 entering students. In addition, we believe we will sustain our current fundraising levels for FY 2009–10.

We are now in the early stages of a planned growth strategy aimed at an enrollment of 750. Our plans for achieving that goal include carefully developed recruitment and retention strategies. Seven-hundred-fifty students constitute a level of enrollment that can be sustained without major additional capital expenditures or significant increases in permanent faculty or staff. The purpose of this growth plan is to diminish the shortfall between tuition revenue and expenditures, thereby decreasing the pressure on annual fundraising.

Bennington broke ground in June 2009 on a $20 million Center for the Advancement of Public Action (CAPA). This building, to be completed in late fall 2010, will house a new curricular initiative focused on the public good to match and enhance Bennington's historic commitment to the development of individual talent. Through this new curriculum, students will engage directly the major challenges they will face as citizens and the capacities necessary to exercise their civic responsibilities, given the enormity, range, complexity, and urgency of those challenges. In addition to Bennington's faculty, students, and staff, visiting scholars and practitioners from outside the College, including business and political leaders, journalists, lawyers, and social activists, will be engaged in this initiative. CAPA will also serve to connect the field work term (FWT) experience more deeply to the classroom experience. Additionally, as much of the new curricular initiative centers on programs for first-year students, we believe it will help to improve retention rates. From the admissions standpoint, it has already begun to attract attention from the kinds of students the College seeks. Finally, the new initiative has provided and we think will continue to provide opportunities for attracting philanthropic support from individuals and foundations.

In terms of other academic programs, we have made positive strides in a number of directions since the 2003 interim self-study. Working groups of faculty members have come together to create a clear, flexible articulation of the Plan process and are homing in on advanced work guidelines; the results are expected to strengthen and make more transparent the essential processes at the center of each student's education. The establishment of the Curriculum Planning Committee has helped to engage faculty more deeply "in thinking about institutional effectiveness," as advised by NEASC following the 2003 self-study process. Systematic program/discipline group reviews, initiated in 2003, continue to afford the kind of assessment needed for optimal planning and decision-making. We have also greatly expanded Bennington's participation in external assessment research, in addition to initiating several new internal evaluation processes.

Over the past decade, Bennington has regained and sustained our competitive market position with regard to attracting a robust applicant pool. In recent years, the College has reached milestone application and inquiry numbers and begun to rebuild key relationships in core metropolitan markets. Improved retention is a priority of the strategic plan currently being developed. In addition to the new curricular initiative that will enhance the first-year experience, we are also improving advising mechanisms by instituting full-time, first-year staff advisors, and adding new FWT options for first-year students.

While the College remains committed to expanding the numbers of faculty and students of color, we have not yet achieved our goals. Diversity has historically been a challenge because of the College's size, location, educational structure, and limited financial aid resources. We have identified diversity (race, economic, geographic, gender, and academic interest) as a priority in our five-year strategic plan. Diversity plans for admissions include minority grants, activities in particular geographic regions, and targeted recruitment strategies for students of color. The College has also taken steps in recent years to improve the racial and cultural diversity of its faculty through targeted advertising, increased usage of sabbatical opportunities to diversify faculty, and consistent encouragement of cultural and racial diversity in the faculty search and curriculum development processes.

We have steadily improved academic and student life services since the last self-study, with greatly increased investments in library and information resources, technology, and the physical plant. In addition to three new student houses built in 2001, we completed a new student center in 2006, which has enriched campus and student life programming. Completion of the complex of buildings that will house the Center for the Advancement of Public Action will also add significantly to the academic resources of the College. The Center is expected to be completed at the end of 2010. The physical transformation of the campus over the last ten years, reflecting internal changes at the College, is the result of effective planning, increased financial resources, improved management, and intensive collaboration. As part of overall campus planning, we have committed ourselves to sustainable practices.

The ongoing challenge remaining for Bennington is to continue to reduce the differential between the major revenue streams—tuition, annual fundraising, and investment revenues—and expenditures. Our long-term planning is focused on this objective, using a mix of programmatic and enrollment strategies.

STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND PURPOSES

Description

The men and women who brought Bennington College into being sought to create a college, 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."

The principle of learning by practice and the emphasis on the individual underlie 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. The Plan process, through which students design their academic experiences and navigate their Bennington careers, embodies the College's mission.

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 its mission and restore its 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, 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 included on the College's website. The text delineates the College's mission, philosophy, and purposes, both in specific language and through general content. The Symposium Report is available on the College's website and its first principles are included in the student handbook.

Appraisal

Bennington was founded with a fundamental commitment to ensuring that its mission and purposes would guide not only curricular and other academic programming, but also underlie academic structures, governance practices, extracurricular activities—indeed, the community culture as a whole. This commitment was reaffirmed and reanimated during the Symposium process in 1993–94. Since then, that goal is closer to realization in certain areas, including a strengthened Plan process that reemphasizes its role as the central academic organizational structure; the further integration of the field work term into every student's Plan; faculty hiring and performance reviews organized and centered around the teacher-practitioner ideal; and the continuing commitment to student self-governance across all aspects of the student experience (academic, communal, and social). In other areas, the College remains engaged in efforts to improve the correlation between objective and result.

Since its first commencement in 1936, Bennington has guided thousands of students through a powerful educational experience founded on the belief that the most compelling education is one that students actively shape themselves. But the College has continually wrestled with the inherent intellectual tension between the self-directed and self-reflective process and the role of the individual in a larger social community. While the College's field work term and student self-governance structures were designed to and, in some measure, have addressed this divide, we have sought innovative ways to fuse these issues *within* our curriculum. Over the past five years, Bennington has worked to bring the same order of intensity to the issue of civic education as it did in its founding years when it introduced new and compelling ideas into the world of liberal arts education.

In 2003, Bennington began work on an initiative called the Democracy Project, intended to provide a curricular framework to focus on critical questions, for example: What kind of a world are we making? What kind of a world should we be making? What kind of a world can we make? Faculty throughout the College were invited to participate and many did, including mathematicians, artists, scientists, and social scientists. This initiative also helped the College attract world renowned practitioners to the faculty from across the globe (South African hero, freedom fighter, and first minister of transport Mac Maharaj, for example), and provided a framework to convene several major conferences that served as educational forums for the College and for the local Bennington community. In summer 2006, the president convened a core group of faculty and staff to explore the possibility of dramatically expanding the Democracy Project to extend its reach throughout the College and to make its aims fundamental to a Bennington education. From January through May 2007, that group grew to more than half of the faculty and resulted in several new curricular directions more fully described in Standard Four.

Projection

Over the next several years, as Bennington's new curricular direction develops, the College must continually evaluate our progress with attention to core principles and mission. Bennington has just begun a strategic planning process that will involve a college-wide engagement and evaluation with trustees, senior staff, faculty, and other key constituencies. Throughout this process, we will keep the College's mission and purposes as our touchstone.

Institutional Effectiveness

The NEASC team that conducted the site visit in 2003 began its report with the following observation, commending the College's effectiveness in cultivating its mission:

> The Team has been impressed by the distinguishing features of [Bennington's] culture which are everywhere evident and which have, in the broadest sense, defined the institution from the time of its founding. It is a culture that is remarkably pervasive, well understood by all in the community of faculty, staff, and students, and a force in itself that should not be underestimated in its ability to provide a continuing and cohesive set of values, traditions and even procedures.

Bennington's effectiveness in communicating our mission and purposes continues to be demonstrated by the sense of purpose shared by the College's various community members and stakeholders, now and throughout our history.

STANDARD TWO: PLANNING AND EVALUATION

Introduction

Strategic and organizational planning at Bennington is a collaborative effort among the senior staff, the faculty, and the board. The board oversees, reviews, and approves all educational, financial, and personnel policy issues pertaining to the College. The president is responsible for making recommendations to the board and for implementing board-approved policies. The president works closely with administration, staff, and faculty to implement policies. Short- and long-term planning takes place at multiple levels throughout the institution.

Description

Strategic Planning

As the College's financial position has strengthened and options for growth and consolidation have increased, the possibility and desirability for long-term strategic planning have increased as well. The senior staff is developing a detailed, multi-faceted, long-term strategic plan, which has been vetted first by the trustees and then by the faculty. The plan focuses on four areas:

- *Mission and market position*
  Priorities include increasing diversity and academic strength of the applicant pool, recruiting and retaining a distinguished faculty, reviewing academic disciplines, and reorienting curricular priorities by continuing to develop the new curricular initiative on advancing public action.

- *Enrollment management*
  Priorities include strengthening student retention and sustaining and enhancing the College's admissions position.

- *Institutional infrastructure*
  Priorities include strengthening infrastructure in institutional technology, facilities and maintenance, and food services.

- *Asset and revenue management and enhancement*
  Priorities include expanding and sustaining philanthropic support, enhancing enrollment revenue, leveraging Bennington's assets for maximum return, and developing new revenue streams.

The College sees this strategic plan as a well-developed set of ambitions, objectives, and expectations, rather than as a fixed roadmap. It is intentionally designed to be flexible and iterative. Benchmarks and milestones have been established in each of the four major areas. Members of the senior staff have been assigned to oversee each area. Senior staff meetings have been reconfigured to include a bi-monthly focus on the management, review, analysis, and further development of the plan.

Operational Planning

Budgetary Planning and Evaluation
The College's annual budget process begins in late fall when the business office distributes budget request forms for the upcoming fiscal year, accompanied by expenditure guidelines for that period. At the same time, preliminary revenue estimates are made for enrollment, the projected increases in tuition and other charges, fundraising, and revenue from investments and from other miscellaneous sources. Throughout the winter and spring, these factors are adjusted as updated information is available. In mid-May a budget is presented to the Finance and Audit Committee of the board for preliminary review prior to being presented to the full board for approval at its June meeting.

In addition to the annual budgeting process, the business office routinely prepares multi-year budget projections. Those projections are integral to the College's evolving strategic plan.

Academic and Enrollment Planning and Evaluation

Academic planning and evaluation are led by the provost and dean, who works closely with the associate dean for academic affairs (a new position since 2004), the associate dean for academic services, the dean of students, and the assistant dean for budget and administration (a new position since 2004). The provost and dean is a member of two faculty committees that meet on a weekly basis—the Academic Policies Committee (elected) and the Curriculum Planning Committee (appointed)—to address the academic policy and curricular issues of the College. In recent years, the Academic Policies Committee (APC) has reviewed the student evaluation system and made recommendations to modify the system in significant ways. APC is currently working with each discipline group, addressing issues of advanced work as well as working to clarify the student Plan process. (A complete description of the student Plan process is provided in Standard Four.) The Curriculum Planning Committee (CPC) was established to assure a college-wide overview in monitoring the curriculum. CPC also has reviewed and revised the course evaluation form. The Faculty Performance Review Committee reviews faculty with multi-year contracts and makes recommendations for re-appointment. The faculty meet weekly in discipline groups to accommodate the planning needs of each group.

As part of our commitment to assessment and planning, the College has instituted systematic reviews of discipline groups and other programs, which include the participation of external reviewers. Typically, one review per year is conducted. The plan is for each program to be reviewed every ten years. Most recently, reviews have been conducted in the drama program, the education program, the library, the music program, and the dance program. A schedule of upcoming reviews is available.

Establishing objectives, benchmarks, and strategies to address retention is an important part of the College's strategic plan. Bennington has routinely had a six-year graduation percentage rate in the low 60s. We recognize this as a major institutional issue, given the impact this attrition rate has on our finances and the questions it raises about student satisfaction. A detailed discussion about retention issues and strategies can be found in Standard Six. With regard to planning and evaluation, we have examined our retention situation in various ways (reviewing files, conducting exit interviews with students, and tracking figures in multiple ways). We have also prepared numerous studies and conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Campus Facilities Planning and Evaluation

The vice president for planning and special programs has integrated short- and long-term campus planning into the College's regular processes. A campus building and landscape master plan (developed and implemented in 2004 and adjusted in 2008) has provided a blueprint for the physical campus that is responsive to changing academic, residential, and recreational/social needs. A log of all campus maintenance and capital project needs is assessed and updated throughout each term. Systems assessments and feasibility studies for older buildings are conducted regularly to plan for upgrades and future projects. In 2006, the College engaged Sightlines, a facilities management consulting firm, to review and analyze our facilities operation and annual and capital budget allocations, and to provide comparative benchmarking data with peer institutions. That effort longitudinally documented FY 2004–06 and has continued annually. It has facilitated a plan for improved resource allocation, management of the facilities staff, and stewardship of the College's physical assets.

The College engages faculty, staff, and students in collaborative processes regarding facilities planning through open meetings, community bulletins, and focused group discussions. The strategic planning process will serve as a guide for facilities and capital expenditure decision-making.

Technological Planning and Evaluation

Technological planning and evaluation has until recently focused on responding to the immediate needs of the faculty, students, and staff. There was little systematic, regular review and assessment of overall needs and priorities.

In 2007, as part of our strategic planning priorities and through working with the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education (NITLE), the College secured a consultant to review our technology infrastructure, organization, and personnel. The consultant met with IT personnel, senior staff, and others to assess the situation. The plan developed as a result of the report is discussed in Standard Eight.

Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment

For years, the College has had a fairly decentralized structure to conduct research and evaluate programs. Research, planning, and assessment have been handled on an as-needed basis, in response to immediate pressures and concerns. As we have learned more about how to conduct institutional research and planning and about the value of this work, we have committed more resources and time to this effort. The College's management information analyst handles the collection, verification, organization, and effective presentation of a wide range of business planning and institutional research data. A new version of the College's institutional research committee was established in 2007, chaired by a faculty member well versed in social science research methodologies and the associate provost for planning, research, and assessment (a new position since February 2009). During the academic year 2007–08, this committee reviewed existing data collection throughout the campus; in fall 2008, the committee established guidelines and procedures for administering internally developed surveys. We are now updating our transcript analysis to determine enrollment patterns and creating an outline and schedule for an annual fact book.

In the past two years, the College has joined the Association for Institutional Research (AIR), the Northeast Association for Institutional Research, and the Higher Education Data Sharing organization. We have secured two grants to expand our work: a Davis Educational Foundation grant to participate in the Wabash National Study on Liberal Learning and a Teagle Foundation grant to study how faculty at different colleges assess senior theses. We have committed professional development funds for the associate provost to attend a Foundations Institute on institutional research through AIR and an Assessment Institute at Harvard University. A joint enrollment planning project is underway with Hampshire College to review overlapping admitted students. We have participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) for 12 years since it began in 1966 (1966–1975, 1984, and 2005). Since 2005, we have participated in the National Study for Student Engagement (NSSE) and in 2007–08 participated in the Beginning College Student Survey on Student Engagement.

Appraisal

Strategic Planning

The College's planning and evaluation are becoming increasingly systematic, comprehensive, and integrated. This process has been very successful in helping us navigate both short-term issues as well as attending to the long-term future of the College. Substantial planning for the Center for Advancement of Public Action has been ongoing for the last three years involving a host of faculty, staff, and administration. As expected with such a major undertaking, there have been points of conflict, both substantive and procedural. Nonetheless, Bennington continues draw on its deep capacity to work through tensions collaboratively in order to sustain its role as a vanguard institution.

Operational Planning

Budgetary Planning and Evaluation

The annual budgeting process has been successful in furthering the programmatic goals of the College. The guidelines of the last several years have tended to keep the increase in routine spending at approximately 2.5 percent per annum, allowing larger increases in areas where the College wishes to devote additional resources. Faculty salaries, field work term expenditures, and staffing in the provost and dean's office are areas that have benefited from increased budget allocations. Work remains to be done (faculty salaries, e.g.), but the College's position in that respect vis-à-vis our peers has improved over the past several years.

The integration of future budget projections with the evolving strategic plan has resulted in more cohesive discussion and decision-making. Recent conversations about enrollment—How can we make our admissions strategy more effective? How can we improve retention rates? —have led to consideration of student housing questions that may arise in the next two to five years. The College's long-term planning has clearly improved as a result of the recently launched strategic planning initiative.

Academic and Enrollment Planning and Evaluation

The Academic Policies Committee (APC), the Curriculum Planning Committee (CPC), and the Faculty Performance Review Committee (FPRC) serve as the key faculty-based planning and evaluation bodies. A recent review of the policies and procedures governing these bodies (more fully discussed in Standard Five) offered the opportunity for faculty-wide discussion of the workings of the committees and clarified their respective purposes. APC and CPC develop their annual agendas in response to issues and concerns raised by faculty, administration, and students. They continually evaluate the efficacy of processes and procedures and make recommendations for change. The challenge for these committees is first to determine the most pressing issues and second to garner the human resources to carry out the work.

Upon the advice of the previous NEASC team, we have made significant progress in developing systems that use qualitative data to assess our progress. The student Plan process, for example, generates an exceptional amount of qualitative information; our challenge has been to translate that information into effective ways of measuring current practice and determining desirable interventions. As discussed more fully in Standards Four and Six, our qualitative data gathering has included focus groups, interviews, surveys, and coding of student reflection essays. As noted, we also participate in several national surveys, including the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE), Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), and the Admitted Students Questionnaire (ASQ). Although we have just begun to systematically assess the value of our participation in these surveys, we have learned about some concerns that we were not aware of previously and we also gained confirmation about some of our advertised strengths. We learned of surprisingly mixed results on "supportive campus environment," for example, and we also learned that student-faculty relationships at Bennington are consistently strong, which was not at all surprising. When NSSE and the more recent BCSSE were introduced, we decided that they were more pertinent to Bennington than the CIRP survey, so we have opted out of CIRP in the last few years. We are just now delving more deeply into the ASQ. Along with Hampshire College, we are trying to tease out more nuanced information from the ASQ, so we are investigating our overlap pool of applicants/admitted students to explore ASQ questions related to perceptions of colleges and college choice.

Campus Facilities Planning and Evaluation

Much has been accomplished in the area of facilities planning in the last several years: the creation of a senior staff position dedicated to physical campus planning; the hiring of Sightlines, a consulting firm, engaged in facilities assessment and planning; the establishment of a facilities planning team to review and analyze campus needs and improvements; and the completion of the Getty Foundation grant report for documenting campus buildings/landscape and setting guidelines for future improvements to historic buildings. The strategic plan will assist in setting capital priorities and enhance physical resources for teaching and learning. A planned update of facilities management digital records will serve as a valuable planning tool.

Technology Planning and Evaluation

In the late 1990s, a plan for the acquisition of an ERP solution for the College was developed. Implementation was incomplete, however, due to a number of factors, including software that did not perform as anticipated, changing priorities in the various offices, and insufficient financial resources. The resulting functional gaps were filled through ad hoc programming solutions. Operational and performance data has not been collected to enable more detailed capacity planning. Technology was replaced when its useful life had passed rather than through a planned refresh process.

The NITLE report provided the College with a specific set of short- and medium-term objectives for technology upgrades and expansion on the campus. The College is working to implement the initial recommendations, including creating a new position of chief information officer and upgrading network and wireless infrastructure. These first recommendations have begun to be implemented during the 2008-09 academic year.

Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning

The newly established position of associate provost for planning, research, and assessment allows us to devote systematic attention to questions that matter deeply to Bennington. In a small college, the temptation can be to spread ourselves too thin or to focus on the loudest problem of the moment. Our data is located in several places, not all of them electronic. Our data systems do not work smoothly enough, independently or office-to-office, so we are currently somewhat limited in capturing accurate data. In addition, the current Plan database cannot track

the evolution of student Plans over time, and this limits our knowledge of how students work through the Plan process from term to term. One clear need is to improve our technological infrastructure so that our emerging research and assessment efforts can be secure and accessible. If we ever hope to develop a data warehouse, this will be critical.

Part of the charge of the Institutional Research Committee is to review and oversee survey administration in a more thoughtful and planned way. The procedures proposed for fall 2008 needed some fine-tuning, but this was a positive and long-overdue first step.

We have made considerable progress, giving serious attention to institutional research, assessment, and planning, all with an eye toward improving student learning. We continue to learn as much as possible about the field, connecting with professionals and trying to discover the questions that matter most to Bennington, now and in an ongoing way.

PROJECTION

Strategic Planning

As do all colleges, we face the current double-pressures of needing to gather, report, and use comprehensive, meaningful, and accurate information, and to do so in a transparent and systematic way. Our strategic plan will guide our work for the next several years in keeping us rooted to agreed-upon priorities. We expect that the subcommittee work will continue for the next few years and that this work will first be reported in senior staff meetings. The president and provost and dean will update the faculty as needed in monthly meetings and the board in quarterly meetings.

Operational Planning

Budgetary Planning and Evaluation

The College's recent improvements in financial planning will continue. The enrollment model for new students, prepared in conjunction with the dean of admissions and financial aid, and a separate model for continuing students, prepared with the assistance of the management information analyst, will continue to be the basis for budgetary projections of enrollment revenue. The College's CFO will continue to work with the vice president for external relations and the president to develop annual and multi-year fundraising expectations.

Expenditure patterns will reflect priorities established by the strategic planning process. The FY 2010 budget, for example, shows a substantial increase in spending for the new curricular initiative in public action. Expected spending in future years continues to grow for this purpose, although those estimates may be modified if the ongoing strategic planning process leads to an emphasis on other matters.

Academic and Enrollment Planning and Evaluation

The recent review of committee structures and their policies, practices, and procedures has demonstrated the need for regularized evaluation. We are committed to conducting such reviews on an annual basis. Similarly, we are actively using data for decision-making in most academic areas. We must continue to determine the most effective and appropriate tools and, at the same time, develop strategies for involving more faculty in the process. In spring 2009, the new associate provost for planning, research, and assessment began collaborating with faculty members and administrators working on program reviews; her support is expected to strengthen the process over time by adding a more informed perspective on assessment. As we develop new courses for the for the advancement in public action curriculum, we will routinely incorporate faculty discussions at critical moments to reflect upon their experiences and their evaluations of how well we are meeting our educational goals. For example, this past spring faculty who had taught design labs met with faculty who are scheduled to teach design labs in the fall met to discuss their experiences and goals for the courses. Similarly, given findings from recent registration enrollment patterns, we will follow up on course and discipline enrollment concerns by continuing discussions in the Curriculum Planning Committee and in small groups within the disciplines. Through extensive discussion with

the faculty begun in spring 2009 and continuing into the fall, we will explore the balance between smaller and larger classes, introductory and other classes, and the impact of technical and space needs related to class size.

Campus Facilities Planning and Evaluation

Work with Sightlines to provide annual facilities analysis and goals will continue. The facilities planning team will evaluate on an annual basis the condition of the physical plant, safety and regulatory compliance, and capital and deferred maintenance needs. The Safety Committee will continue to meet quarterly to review and plan for regular reviews, upgrades, and staff training. The implementation of a comprehensive digital facilities program will begin in 2010. Through the strategic plan, the senior administration will set academic, residential, and recreational priorities. The campus master plan, informed by the strategic plan, will be reviewed annually to provide realistic and achievable goals.

Technology Planning and Evaluation

A primary role for the new chief information officer will be the ongoing assessment of technology infrastructure and operations, including the development of a strategic plan for IT. Various instruments and methods will be employed to gather user feedback, to monitor and track trends, and to document status and plans. Strategic alignment of IT goals with institutional priorities will be aided by inclusion of the chief information officer in the senior staff of the College. Advisory committees drawn from faculty, student, and staff groups will be established to insure transparency as well as to act as sounding boards for proposals and ideas. Benchmarking with peer

institutions through the EDUCAUSE Core Data Survey, for example, will assist in calibrating goals and results. Financial plans will be multi-year and incorporate full lifecycle costs for capital projects. IT will establish regular review, self-assessment, and continuous improvement.

Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning

An office of institutional research, established through the new associate provost, will link the work of research, assessment, and planning explicitly to improved student learning. We will aim to make institutional information more accessible to members of the internal and external community through the College website.

Institutional Effectiveness

Bennington College, in its relevant constituencies (board, faculty, and staff), determines the effectiveness of planning and evaluation routinely at each level. When issues arise, the College works collaboratively to address them and revises planning and evaluation practices accordingly. The strategic planning process provides the means for developing a long-term framework that includes broad priorities and ambitious but achievable benchmarks, with evaluation and reassessment built into the process.

STANDARD THREE: ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

Description

The structure of the board and obligations of the trustees are set out in the by-laws of the Bennington College Corporation. Article XI, sections 1 and 2 of the by-laws specify 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 programs 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 or more than 35 voting members. Currently there are 19 voting members. The president of the College is an *ex officio* member of the board; the executive vice president of finance and administration is treasurer, *ex officio;* and the assistant to the president serves as secretary, *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 six standing committees of the board are the Executive Committee, the Committee on Educational Policy and Student Life, the Facilities Committee, the Committee on Development and External Relations, the Finance and Audit Committee, and the Committee on Trusteeship. The Executive Committee 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 investments. One *ad hoc* committee is currently at work to oversee investment policies and performance. A full board directory and committee membership list are available.

Meeting Schedule

The board has an annual meeting in June and typically meets three additional times each year. Board committees meet independently prior to or in conjunction with each board meeting, and the full board of trustees meets in executive and general sessions. Faculty and students are invited to meet with the trustees as needed.

Administration

- *President.* The president, appointed 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 Policies Committee, and meets regularly with staff. She frequently teaches and often serves as an academic advisor.

- *Senior staff.* In managing the day-to-day operations of the College, the president is assisted by the senior staff; this top administrative tier includes the executive vice president for finance and administration, the provost and dean, the dean of students, the associate dean for academic services, the dean of admissions and financial aid, the vice president for external relations, the vice president for planning and special programs, the vice president and chief information officer, the senior advisor and special assistant to the president, and the assistant to the president/director of communications.

  The organizational structure of the College is represented in the chart on page ix of this report. Descriptions of the responsibilities of each senior staff member may be found in the student handbook.

  Weekly 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

The provost and dean is the chief academic officer and works closely with the president and faculty to oversee and coordinate academic life. The faculty is responsible for developing the curriculum and for making recommendations to the provost and dean about academic programs, faculty appointments, faculty reviews, and academic budgeting. Faculty members carry out these activities through their participation in meetings of related disciplines, the Curriculum Planning Committee, the Academic Policies Committee, and other College standing and *ad hoc* committees. The faculty meets formally each month of the academic year to conduct elections for committees, vote on policy recommendations, and report on committee work and other academic and administrative items. During the 2007–08 academic year, the faculty initiated a series of meetings, called Faculty Forum, designed to discuss a variety of issues of importance to the faculty.

The directors of all graduate programs report to the provost and dean.

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. The following standing committees are currently in place (additional information on several of these committees is available):

Faculty Elected Committees
- *Academic Policies Committee.* The Academic Policies Committee (APC) is composed of an elected faculty chair, six other elected faculty members, one elected faculty alternate, the president (*ex officio*), the provost and dean (*ex officio*), and the executive vice president for finance and administration (*ex officio*). APC reviews and makes recommendations concerning matters of academic policy—including long-term planning, academic programs, faculty leaves of absence, curriculum, and academic budgeting— to appropriate entities, including but not limited to the faculty, president, provost and dean, and executive vice-president.

- *Faculty Committee on Grievances.* Created in January 2006, the Faculty Committee on Grievances (FCG) replaced the Faculty Grievance Committee to hear not only alleged violations of the College's Academic Freedom Policy (outside of the faculty performance review process) and grievances regarding alleged discrimination, but also complaints against faculty by faculty or by those referred by the provost and dean. FCG is made up of three elected members and two alternates. The associate dean for academic affairs also participates.

- *Faculty Review Appeals Committee.* Renamed in January 2006, the Faculty Review Appeals Committee (FRAC) hears alleged violations of faculty performance review procedures, including violations of the College's academic freedom policy during the review process. The committee consists of three elected faculty members and two alternates.

- *Faculty Performance Review Committee.* The Faculty Performance Review Committee (FPRC) reviews and makes recommendations regarding faculty reappointments. There are five elected faculty members and one alternate. The provost and dean is a member of the committee.

Provost and Dean's Appointed Committees

- *Curriculum Planning Committee.* Established in 2003, the Curriculum Planning Committee (CPC) composed of the provost and dean, the associate dean for academic affairs, and faculty representatives from each of the disciplines, is responsible for short- and long-term curriculum planning as well as for reviewing and approving the curriculum. CPC also reviews and evaluates other policies and procedures relevant to curricular planning, such as course evaluation forms and processes, independent study guidelines, and registration processes.

- *Library Committee.* Reconstituted in 2003, the committee is co-chaired by the provost and dean and the director of library and information services. Members include faculty, students, and staff. The committee is charged with reviewing and making recommendations regarding the library's policies and procedures, user information and services, print and online resources, and archives and special collections.

- *Faculty Advising Committee.* Established in 2001, the committee works in collaboration with the associate dean for academic services and the dean of students to review and make recommendations regarding the academic advising process. The committee schedules regular meetings to assist faculty and students with advising issues and has particular responsibilities for probationary students.

- *Judicial Committee.* This committee hears cases concerning infractions of community standards. The committee is made up of seven students (three hear any given case); three staff members (one hears any given case); and three faculty members (one hears any given case). The assistant director of student life chairs the committee. Cases are brought before the committee by the dean of students. Faculty and staff members are appointed each academic year in consultation with the provost and dean. Student members (in good academic and disciplinary standing) are selected via an application and interview process conducted by student life staff and student leaders. Selected students are reappointed annually until graduation or resignation.

- *Committee on Research Using Human Subjects.* The committee, consisting of three appointed faculty members, ensures that research conducted by Bennington College faculty members and students adequately protects the welfare of human subjects who participate in it. Committee approval is required for all research on human subjects conducted by College faculty members and students.

- *Institutional Research Committee.* Reconstituted in fall 2007, the committee is co-chaired by the new associate provost for planning, research, and assessment, along with a long-time faculty member in psychology (and former dean of the faculty). The committee has representatives from the president's office, dean's office, student life office, admissions office, external relations office, and business office; a student member also sits on the committee. The committee is charged with reviewing current data collection and practices.

    Other committees appointed by the provost and dean include the Scholarship Committee, the Production Committee, and the Bookstore Committee.

President's Appointed Committees

- *Administrative Review Committee.* The Administrative Review Committee is a disciplinary board constituted as needed to hear appeals from the rulings of the Judicial Committee, appeals from the rulings of administratively resolved cases, and any offense referred directly to it by the dean of students or the associate director. The committee normally consists of three senior members of the administration appointed by the president.

- *Sexual Harassment Advisors.* Sexual harassment advisors, appointed by the president, are normally two students, two faculty members, and two staff members. Advisors are available to all members of the community seeking confidential advice and assistance regarding sexual harassment and the College's policy and procedures.

- *Sexual Harassment Hearing Committee.* This committee, appointed by the president, consists of two faculty members, one staff member, and one student and is chaired by the vice president for planning and special programs. The committee has the authority to investigate complaints of sexual harassment, and, as needed, to conduct hearings and make summary recommendations.

- *Safety Committee.* The committee, made up of faculty, students, and staff and chaired by the assistant director of facilities management, is responsible for reviewing matters pertaining to safety on campus. The committee reviews practices and procedures associated with ongoing College operations, ensures that adequate and appropriate safety training occurs, and seeks to identify hazards on campus in need of correction. Campus community members may bring safety concerns to the attention of the chair of the Safety Committee.

- *Land and Building Use Committee.* This committee is charged by the president to set policies governing the enhancement of the College campus, the protection of the environment, the preservation of the built campus, parking, and accessibility of the campus. The committee is chaired by the vice president for planning and special programs and is made up of the executive vice president, the dean of students, the director of facilities management, a member of the faculty in environmental studies and in architecture, the special assistant to the president, and a student appointed by the provost and dean.

- *Sustainability Committee.* Working in collaboration with the president, the vice president for planning and special programs, and the dean of students, students review proposals regarding the implementation of sustainable environmental initiatives.

Staff Elected Committee

- *Staff Association.* This voluntary organization of administrative and support 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 provides information to new and continuing staff about College employment policies, procedures, and benefits.

Student Elected and Appointed Committees

- *House Chairs.* Self-governance is at the core of residential life, and house chairs play a pivotal role in providing leadership and assistance to students residing in their house communities. Two house chairs for each house work collaboratively to foster community development and cooperative living. They are selected and supervised by the dean of students.

Students serve as members of the following student government organizations, described in Standard Six of this report and also available:

- *Student Council.* Composed of elected house delegates, Student Council is the forum for student discussion of non-academic issues (academic issues are covered by the Student Educational Policies Committee), helping to facilitate communication among students, faculty, and administration. Student Council also helps coordinate funding for student organizations. At the beginning of each year, Student Council creates a tentative budget to divide student activities funds among the various campus organizations. The student body at large votes on this budget before funds are distributed.

- *Student Educational Policies Committee.* The Student Educational Policies Committee (SEPC) is a group of students—two for each academic discipline—who represent the student body in issues affecting academic life at Bennington. These SEPC representatives, elected by the student body, serve as a liaison among students, faculty, and administration. The SEPC also considers larger questions of academic policy and articulates its concerns and interests to the campus community.

- *Program Activity Council.* Made up of eight to ten students selected by the student life office, the Program Activity Council is responsible for planning and implementing student activities and works closely with the assistant director of student life for campus event planning.

Appraisal

Board of Trustees

In 2000, trustee Deborah Wadsworth assumed the position of board chair, succeeding John Barr, who had led the board for 12 years. In the 1990s, the board was engaged primarily in leading the College through a period of critical change. Since that time, Ms. Wadsworth has guided the shift in focus to one of steady growth and renewal. The board has overseen the following major initiatives during this period: the construction of three new student houses and a new student center, the development of a facilities and landscape master plan and a campus renewal program, and the launch of major new curricular initiatives. To accomplish these undertakings, the trustees led the College in a $75 million capital campaign, a goal surpassed by more than $15 million—and unprecedented in the College's history.

The board continues to comprise a mix of alumni and non-alumni, with members who have an array of diverse experience, backgrounds, and skills. The chairman, president, and executive committee annually evaluate trustees on the basis of several criteria, including attendance and appropriate participation in board meetings, quality of service and philanthropy, and other measures. The board needs to continue its search for new members to plan for the next generation of leaders and contributors.

The committee structure of the board was revised in 2004 and 2005 to expand its effectiveness by creating a Facilities Committee and a standing Subcommittee on Investments of the Finance and Audit Committee. In 2008, the president invited the trustees to participate in three task forces as part of the strategic planning process: admissions/core markets, philanthropy, and assets and new revenue opportunities. These additions reflect the increased engagement of the board and will enhance its efficacy in dealing with the opportunities and challenges facing the College in this period of growth.

Administration

The last 10 years have seen several positive changes in academic administrative structures for greater support in planning, oversight, and integration of students' experience. The position of provost and dean replaced the dean of faculty position and, in addition to all academic programs, now oversees the student life office, the registrar's office, library and information services, institutional research, information technology, and an expanded field work term program, among others. The new structure has improved communication between and among offices, as well as established a more coherent approach to the curricular and co-curricular work of the College. A recent example is the involvement of the library staff and field work term staff in planning meetings with faculty as they develop courses for the new curricular initiative on advancing public action.

A new, centralized facilities planning position oversees short- and long-term campus development, resulting in a more systematic and comprehensive facilities plan. More robust admissions, development, and communications operations are contributing to a record number of applications and increasing enrollments, record fundraising, and a more dynamic online presence. The senior staff is a collaborative, stable body (the members have remained the same for the last three years, and half have served the College for more than 10 years), meeting weekly with the president to maintain communication and review major issues. The group also began meeting bi-weekly in 2008 for dedicated strategic planning sessions. The areas that need to be addressed more aggressively are planning transition strategies for new leadership, as well as continuing to manage growth with limited resources.

Faculty

During the tenure of the provost and dean, two new faculty governance structures were created: the Curriculum Planning Committee and the Faculty Grievance Committee. Under the provost and dean's leadership, faculty were engaged in a thorough review of several faculty governance structures, including the Academic Policies Committee, the Curriculum Planning Committee, the grievance process, and the faculty performance review process. In response to issues raised by the Faculty Forum, the College revised the faculty contract, updated and expanded the faculty handbook, and discussed compensation issues with the board of trustees. These discussions and reviews of policy and procedures have resulted in a new level of engagement with and participation of the faculty in organization and governance.

Students

Students at Bennington assume a strong responsibility for self-governance in their academic and non-academic lives. For undergraduate students, Student Council, working with support from the office of student life, primarily provides budget allocations to student organizations. Its current organizational priorities are to formalize its committee structure and membership. Although these have been ongoing issues for Student Council, there is greater momentum to determine the future focus of this group. The Student Educational Policies Committee (SEPC), its academic counterpart, works with faculty through the Academic Policies and Curriculum Planning Committees. SEPC, advised by the office of student life in conjunction with the provost and dean's office, has been helpful in collaborating with the development of processes and procedures that support the academic life of students. The role of house chairs has evolved and matured over the last 10 years, assuming a greater degree of accountability, responsibility, and perceived leadership by students. The challenge for the office of student life is to work with student organizations to enhance and support a culture of leadership, development, and community involvement.

Projection

The recent activity in strategic planning by the board will play an important role in creating a blueprint for the College's future and providing for our continued health and stability. With a plan in place, the senior administration will monitor progress against annual objectives to measure how well these goals are achieved. The senior administration will continue to examine the structures in place to achieve a more robust, competitive institution.

The faculty committees will continue their review of governance documents to bring greater clarity and to ensure that current practices are in alignment with written policies and procedures.

The student life staff will work with the leaders of Student Council and SEPC to provide support for strengthening these organizations and enhancing the recruitment and training of members. There will be an aggressive effort to promote the development of student organizations in the coming year. This development will also force the restructuring of the budget allocation process coordinated by Student Council. Additionally, plans are underway for an audit of student leadership with the goal of creating more opportunities and cultivating emerging leaders.

Institutional Effectiveness

The College has grown in size and complexity over the years and most of our governance structures have adapted to keep pace with the changes. The effectiveness of the organizational structure is usually assessed organically and often by those most immediately involved.

The board of trustees and administrative leadership regularly review and analyze the effectiveness of governance structures, as evidenced by the strategic planning process and the formation of targeted trustee task forces. The faculty committee structures are examined routinely to ensure that they are current and relevant. Similarly, student leaders work with College staff and faculty to review and improve the effectiveness of their governance structures.

STANDARD FOUR: THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Introduction

From the founding of Bennington in 1932 through the 1994 restructuring and most recently during the 75th anniversary celebrations in 2007, the College has reaffirmed our commitment to student-centered liberal education and a corresponding commitment to renewal and reflection. At Bennington, students are required to take responsibility for the design of their education. Each year at commencement, beginning with the first graduating class in 1936, the purpose and principles of a Bennington education are re-articulated in a statement read to those gathered for the ceremony. In part, it states that the College's 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." The academic program, in its content and structure, is designed to support students in their pursuit of these ideals.

Bennington's primary academic activity is undergraduate education leading to the Bachelor of Arts degree. The College also offers graduate degree programs in writing and literature, the performing arts, and teaching. A postbaccalaureate premedical certificate program for college graduates is offered as well.

Description

The Undergraduate Program

Questions, rather than academic disciplines, guide a Bennington education and form the cornerstone of the College's educational philosophy. The College is not organized into traditional departments, nor do we ask students to fulfill a set of general curricular requirements; instead, we challenge them to discover and define their own intellectual identity and to design an education that will shape the rest of their lives. Students are guided in this work by the Plan process—the framework of a Bennington education—through which they progressively formulate and articulate the questions that create their individual academic program and bring it to fruition in sophisticated academic work.

The Plan Process

In the course of designing, defending, and implementing a Plan, each student writes and rewrites a series of prospective and reflective essays that form the basis for ongoing discussions with advisors and faculty Plan committees. Ideally, these exercises in writing and reflection not only demand a continual articulation of ends and means, but they also reveal the progression and essence of a student's academic experience.

As students construct the framework of their Plans, they are making an education that creates a constant interplay between breadth (general education) and depth (advanced work). The breadth component of their education does not simply support or inform the advanced work component; rather, the two are inextricably intertwined. Guided by their advisors and other faculty members, students are expected to be intentional in making real connections and intellectual links between and among courses, disciplines, and work outside the classroom. This integrative, active process of learning is strengthened when students are able to reflect on the trajectory of their own learning; this part of the process is key. The structure of the Plan process mandates thoughtful planning and reflection, calling on students to make ongoing connections among and refinements to their learning experiences.

While the particulars of each student's Plan differ, all follow the same general design. During their first year, students experiment by taking courses in various disciplines. In their second and third years, students work to articulate questions of interest to them and to create a concentrated course of study that most effectively addresses their particular inquiries. Students immerse themselves in the disciplines appropriate to their defining questions and delve more deeply into their intellectual and artistic passions. As their inquiry becomes more focused, they are challenged to frame it within broader contexts—to consider how their deepening understanding of a problem or subject or craft might matter to the rest of the world. Each year, they are required to engage in hands-on work experiences off campus through Bennington's seven-week winter field work term. In their final year, students

often complete a culminating project, allowing them to bring together the discoveries they have made and the expertise they have developed.

The Plan process continues throughout the four years of an undergraduate's education. In fact, it begins during the admissions interviews, in which trained counselors and admissions office interns engage applicants in conversations designed to initiate a process of reflection about their education.

On campus, the process continues in the faculty advising relationship. The first Plan-related task—a first-term reflection essay—takes place under advisor guidance and places early emphasis on the centrality of the Plan as guideline. Again working with a faculty advisor, each student prepares a Plan proposal in the third term and presents that proposal to a faculty Plan committee, typically comprising the student's advisor as chair and two additional faculty members appointed by the dean's office. The Plan sets forth the student's aims and the coursework, field work, and other means designed to attain them. Students frequently propose coursework integrating more than one discipline. The student meets again with the Plan committee in the sixth term for a confirmation meeting. Following these meetings, the faculty committee considers the appropriateness of the student's goals and the likelihood of success in pursuing the proposed Plan. Students are often asked to rethink and revise their Plans and to participate in interim meetings, which may be called for by the advisor, the Plan committee, the dean's office, or the student. In the senior year, the student writes a senior reflection essay. Successful completion of each step of the Plan process is linked to academic standing.

Traditionally, disciplines or departments would decide requirements for the major. Bennington has neither departments to mandate courses of study nor traditionally defined majors; rather, definitions of advanced work emerge individually, from the question or questions driving each student's Plan. Advisors and Plan committees are responsible for ensuring that each Plan leads to and includes the required sophistication and depth to constitute advanced work. The Plan committee is responsible for ensuring that students design an education with breadth and depth, fueled by their questions and interests.

The Curriculum

The faculty is responsible for the development of the College's liberal arts curriculum. Courses designed by the faculty are driven by their own interests, student interests, and an overarching commitment to the needs of their respective disciplines and of the student body. With oversight by the Curriculum Planning Committee (CPC), the undergraduate curriculum is organized and reviewed by discipline groups that include literature, social sciences, science and mathematics, languages, dance, drama, visual arts, and music. While these categories serve to organize and present the curriculum, the faculty is committed to an interdisciplinary approach to curricular planning and faculty members have also developed various interdisciplinary curricular groupings. Most recently, for example, faculty members from science and mathematics, visual arts, and literature collaborated to develop a proposal for an environmental studies program, which was subsequently funded by the Mellon Foundation.

CPC works closely with the Academic Policies Committee (APC), which is responsible for reviewing and making recommendations concerning general matters of academic policy, including the curriculum. Considering CPC's particular focus, however, it is uniquely attuned to the need for changes in policies and procedures regarding the curriculum and curricular-related activities. As such, APC and CPC have agreed that CPC will seek the approval of APC before undertaking review and evaluation of policies and procedures relevant to curricular planning. Each term, CPC reports to APC on its activities and seeks APC's approval before making significant changes. Another example of their collaborative work: During the 2007–08 academic year, APC requested that the faculty in discipline groups consider College-wide faculty hiring priorities. Following a process of review and deliberation, APC made a recommendation to the president and provost and dean that the College make the hiring of historians a priority in the coming years, stressing the importance of recruiting scholars who work across disciplines.

New Curricular Initiative: Advancing Public Action

Over the last two years, the College has undertaken a new curricular initiative designed to demonstrate more intentionally its founding commitment to "constructive social purposes." The initiative is intended to integrate into the curriculum a deepened engagement with the most pressing needs of society and to educate students to act effectively in the world at the local, national, and global levels. During that time, more than half of the faculty has participated in broad discussions about the initiative, beginning with a steering committee in summer 2006,

continuing with a group of faculty members during the field work term 2007, and again during the 2007–08 and 2008–09 academic years. Faculty members were compensated for their participation in the discussions, which required considerable time and effort.

Two new curricular formats have emerged from these campus-wide discussions: "design labs" and "modules: transferable approaches." Both are designed primarily as first-year experiences, but upper-class students may be invited by faculty to participate in design labs as discussion facilitators, research assistants, or in other roles. Upper-class students may participate in the modules on a space-available basis. We are considering requiring all first-year students to register for a design lab and some combination of modules.

Students will engage directly through this new curriculum the major challenges they will face as citizens and the capacities necessary to exercise their civic responsibilities, given the enormity, range, complexity, and urgency of those challenges. In addition to Bennington's faculty and students and staff, visiting scholars and practitioners from outside the College, including business and political leaders, journalists, and social activists, will be engaged in this initiative. This "new initiative," as we have come to call it, will also serve to connect the field work term experience much more deeply into the classroom experience.

Design Labs

The design labs are interdisciplinary workshop-style classes that focus on particular problems, issues, or controversies. Each design lab typically involves multiple faculty members as generators, consultants, or researchers, and the course model is one of collaboration among students and faculty. With a focus on deliberation and discussion, each lab examines perspectives from which to consider a critical current problem, issue, or controversy. Each lab features an "intentional inquiries" component, conceived and developed by the library staff in collaboration with the faculty, designed to help students develop information literacy and essential research tools and skills. During the 2007–08 academic year, three design labs were offered as pilots: Green Projects: Community and Campus; Rethinking Education; and Collaboration and Conflict. For 2008–09, six new labs were offered: The AIDS Pandemic: Science, Cultures, and Politics of HIV; The Ocean Project; Branding Britain: Nation Branding, Identity Perceptions, and Foreign Policy; Critical Practice in Design; The Sabba Project; and Leading Change. Faculty members participated in a bi-weekly seminar to discuss the development of the design labs and were compensated for the development of their courses. Almost half of the 2008–09 first-year class was involved in the design labs.

Modules

The modules are three-week courses that use concise investigation of specific topics to hone approaches to learning that may be applied in a broad variety of disciplines. There are no prerequisites; all modules are designed for students who may be unfamiliar with the content or method of inquiry. Each course is given for one credit and students may take one module or up to four. In addition, each module requires attendance at one College lecture/performance/event outside of regularly scheduled class time. The modules introduced during the 2008–09 academic year were: Seeing and Moving: Principles of the Visual and Thinking Body; Orders of Magnitude; Learning to Read Social/Cultural Codes and Symbols through Ikebana; Finding the Core: An Introduction to Mathematical Modeling; The Art of Critique; Seeing the Light; and Noticing, Choosing and Writing to Describe.

Bennington has a long history of inviting visiting faculty and practitioners to share their expertise with the College community. Extending this practice, with a particular focus on the most pressing needs in the world, is another important component of the new curricular initiative. During the 2007–08 and 2008–09 academic years, these guests have included: Larry Diamond, democracy scholar and foreign policy expert; Rebecca Tinsley, journalist and human rights activist; Dr. Barrie Cassileth, leader in integrative medicine and health policy expert; William Polk, foreign policy expert; and Dr. William Schlesinger, leader in global environmental change research and policy. During each visit, the guests have visited individual classes, met with faculty and students, and made presentations to the entire community.

Field Work Term

An integral part of the College's curriculum from its founding, field work term (FWT) is a seven-week winter term during which all undergraduate students are required to complete 210 hours of field work, ideally related to their educational goals. Prior to registering for their FWT, students must outline their goals and learning objectives as well as provide information about their proposed jobs. These must be approved by students'

academic advisors and the FWT director. During FWT, students are overseen by on-site supervisors who complete a performance evaluation. The results of these evaluations, hours completed, adherence to deadlines and a student-written reflection essay are all considered in the final FWT assessment on a pass/marginal pass/fail scale.

Students secure positions in diverse organizations throughout the world, with approximately 20 percent of the student body working in the New York metropolitan area. As in other aspects of their education at Bennington, students are expected to take the lead in finding and securing work for their FWT. Support throughout the process is provided by the FWT and career development office, which offers individual counseling, résumé writing and other workshops, position postings, extensive databases on past FWTs, and other online and print resources.

Study Away

The College encourages students to consider studying elsewhere, preferably during their third year. Bennington does not manage any of its own off-campus semester programs; students study away through other colleges' programs, through third-party providers, or through exchange agreements between Bennington and schools abroad. (We have a 20-year affiliation with The School for Field Studies, for example, and more recently, we have developed an exchange agreement with the Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School and with Rhodes University in South Africa.) To receive approval to study abroad or at another institution in the United States, students initiate an application process that allows for a review of the proposed study-away program to ensure that it meets Bennington's standards. In addition, the application process includes a careful review of proposed courses, their connection to the student's Plan, and the Plan committee's assessment of the study-away program as it relates to the student's goals and current work at Bennington.

Typically, about 30 to 40 students study abroad each year (approximately 5 percent of the student population). All disciplines and a wide variety of destinations are represented among students who choose to go abroad. Recently, students have traveled to Australia, China, Chile, Costa Rica, England, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Russia, and Spain.

In addition to study-away options, students may enroll at Williams College through our cross-enrollment program. Typically, students enroll for one course; each fall, approximately 10 students enroll. (Given conflicting academic calendars, students do not typically enroll during the spring term.) Students submit applications proposing a specific course and explaining how the course relates to the goals of their Bennington Plan. Preference is given to upper-class students. In past terms, the most popular areas of study through this program have been economics, languages, anthropology, art history, neuroscience, and philosophy.

Discipline Group and Program Reviews

Beginning in 2003, the College undertook a series of discipline group/program reviews that include an external review component. In recent years, reviews have addressed drama, the Center for Creative Teaching, music, and dance. We also conducted an extensive review of the library. The reviews are initiated by the office of the provost and dean.

Faculty members in each discipline group or program are responsible for the design and implementation of their review. As part of a thorough self-assessment, they articulate a mission statement and set forth questions and concerns in consultation with the office of the provost and dean. Faculty members also propose experts in appropriate fields as members of the external review team. Documents prepared by the faculty are shared with the external review team, which typically spends two to three days on campus speaking with faculty, students, and staff; visiting classes; and attending meetings and events. Taken together, these internal and external review components provide substantial information for planning and decision-making. In the case of drama, the review guided the direction of new faculty hires; for the library, it provided a blueprint for significant changes undertaken as part of the library renewal.

Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit

The Plan process, with its intense scrutiny of individual students' academic progress, functions as the primary means of ensuring institutional oversight for and integrity of the awarding of academic credit. Although the Plan process is the larger framework for reviewing academic progress, evaluation of student learning progresses on multiple levels throughout students' academic careers; faculty and administration work together to ensure that the degrees awarded accurately reflect students' achievements. The Curriculum Planning Committee is charged with

the responsibility for reviewing appropriate credit levels for each course in the curriculum and the registrar monitors contact hours and stated workload expectations to verify that credit determinations are consistent.

Bennington evaluates students in all classes and through the Plan process as a cumulative way to determine academic standing. The process is both qualitative and quantitative. All students receive narrative evaluations for each class at the end of each term to inform them about their progress and the quality and appropriateness of their work; the narrative evaluations also denote marks of pass, marginal pass, and fail. In addition, more than half of our students also request letter grades. Students are graded on their field work terms by reviewing records of registration, employer evaluations, and student essays; they receive FWT credit, not academic numerical credit. Finally, students are evaluated at every stage of the Plan process, and faculty members, along with the dean's office, determine whether students successfully meet the academic standards (options are pass, defer, pass with contingency, and not approve). These evaluations, along with credit tallies and term status, affect the determination of academic standing at the end of term (good standing, concern, probation, dismissal). The associate dean for academic services determines academic standing.

Two years ago, the responsibility for determining transfer credit for incoming students shifted from the dean's office to the admissions office. The change was made to provide students with timely information about their admission and credit transfer status so that they could make more informed decisions. The dean's office continues to monitor and assess transfer credit for continuing students.

Beginning in spring 2008 and continuing through fall 2008, at the request of the Academic Policies Committee, the College reviewed its academic integrity policy. Plagiarism is a problem on many campuses and it had become clear to some faculty members that we needed to revisit our policy. The committee appointed for this task is composed of faculty, staff (dean's office, student life, library), and students. The committee has recognized the need for a more inclusive policy with regard, for example, to appropriation of imagery and also acknowledged the need to improve the education of students about plagiarism, academic integrity, and collaborative work. The committee strengthened and clarified policy, and agreed to emphasize early education of all students on these issues.

In the larger context of administrative oversight of academic integrity, the College recently completed a two-year restructuring process in the registrar's office. Today, the staff consists of professionals connected to local and national networks and knowledgeable about regulatory issues and technological change.

Assessment of Student Learning

Like most institutions, Bennington has become increasingly aware of the need to know more about student learning. Assessment has become central to our planning efforts as we go forward. As we began preparing for this accreditation review, for example, the College launched a strategic planning process, led by the president, highlighting the need for data that can be used in decision-making. Two key areas demonstrate our strong commitment to integrating evaluation into the life of the institution. During the 2007–08 academic year, the Committee on Institutional Research was reconstituted and its charge clarified to include reviewing data-gathering practices, determining a process for administering internal surveys, providing support for offices interested in developing data collection tools, and eventually acting as a clearinghouse for College data collection. In the 2008–09 academic year, the College established the new position of associate provost for planning, research, and assessment, the first full-time position dedicated to the work of assessment.

We have expanded our participation in externally administered assessment instruments as well. Since 2005, we have participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) project; in 2007, we introduced the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) instrument. Although we had occasionally in the past participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), we shifted resources to NSSE, having concluded that this information on student engagement was more valuable. We also administered the research practices survey for libraries for the first time in fall 2008 and will resurvey the first-year students in spring 2009. We also secured a grant from the Teagle Foundation to explore, along with several other colleges, assessment of senior capstone projects/theses.

In addition, Bennington was chosen to participate in the next group of schools administering the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, funded through the Davis Educational Foundation. In fall 2008, we joined a select group of colleges conducting a four-year longitudinal study to learn which teaching practices,

programs, and institutional structures best support a liberal arts education and to develop methods of assessing liberal arts education. This study focuses on several outcomes: effective reasoning and problem-solving, inclination to inquiry and lifelong learning, integration of learning, intercultural effectiveness, leadership, moral reasoning, and well-being.

Academic Resources

The College has made significant investment in the academic budget in the last six years, with increases averaging 6.4 percent annually. These expenditures have been directed toward faculty salaries, faculty development, classroom and lab support, library enhancements, and academic infrastructure. As discussed in more detail in Standard Eight, we have also made considerable investment in academic computing, including a new instructional technologist position, new laptop computers for all faculty and technicians, the introduction and development of an open-source course management system (Moodle), and the expansion of mediated classrooms. This attention to increased academic resources has strengthened academic programs across the board.

Graduate and Postbaccalaureate Programs

The College has four Master's programs and one postbaccalaureate certificate program. Each program is designed in alignment with its particular stated purposes, but each remains anchored in the philosophy of the College. All decisions regarding requirements, curricula, and faculty hiring are made by the directors and/or faculty of the programs based on their respective purposes and current demands of the field. The office of the dean and provost oversees the programs.

The MFA in Writing and Literature, a low-residency program, has a faculty whose renowned reputation assures the continuation of the high standards that have characterized the program. Each January and June, students, faculty, and staff come together on the Bennington campus for ten-day residencies that include workshops, lectures, readings, and seminars. Students do the bulk of the coursework from their own homes, working one-on-one with faculty members in their chosen genre (poetry, fiction, or nonfiction), reading widely, and responding critically via email. The new director, hired in January 2008, is working to sustain the existing momentum of high quality and standards. Currently, 103 students are enrolled, with a 98 percent retention rate over the last two years.

The other Master's programs are smaller by design and more closely integrated with the undergraduate curriculum. The BA/MAT and MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching) programs are emerging from a period of rapid change, due largely to transitions in leadership. The focus of the program is on pedagogy and reflective practice. Currently, 13 students are enrolled, with a 79 percent retention rate since fall 2006. During the period 2003–08, 94 percent of MAT graduates passed the requirements for licensure. The Master of Arts in Teaching a Second Language program (MATSL), a low-residency program begun in the summer of 2001, seeks to teach K-12 French and Spanish teachers to design and implement instruction that targets linguistic, cultural, and conceptual understanding at all levels of instruction. This program has experienced inconsistent enrollment, with a current enrollment of 20 students. Retention rate is 73 percent since the program's inception.

The MFA programs in dance and music are individually tailored for students. Typically, we have one or two students per year studying in these programs. They work closely with faculty, with a focus on creating their own work. In fall 2008, the drama faculty placed a moratorium on offering the MFA in drama. As with dance and music, the program had been highly individualized. The quality and appropriateness of the applicant pool and the pressure on faculty resources led to the decision to suspend the program.

The postbaccalaureate premedical certificate program is structurally sound and has a long history of success. Students can complete the program in one year, starting in June and finishing the following June. Enrollment has been stable in numbers but variable in the quality of students. In 2008, a part-time admissions counselor was hired to improve enrollment and student quality. Currently, 11 students are enrolled (7 students just completed the program). The retention rate over the last 10 years has averaged 86 percent. Over the last six years, 91 percent of postbac graduates have been admitted to medical school.

Appraisal

The Undergraduate Program

The College has focused and expanded our approach to assessment in general and in particular with respect to academic effectiveness. In 2003, the NEASC evaluation team wrote, "From an institutional effectiveness point of view, the amazing thing is that this process [the Plan] is not thought of as assessment—it is thought of as the Bennington model of education." They noted that while the College "has achieved a weaving of assessment into the curriculum that is very commendable," there was also a need to use the "abundance of qualitative data…to broaden its appreciation of the types of tools that can be used to examine its own effectiveness." The team also stressed the importance of our becoming connected to the national conversations about assessment, noting, "Bennington has much to gain and learn from these conversations as well as much to give and add to these conversations." The College has made substantial progress since 2003; at the same time, we are ever more mindful of our need to continue our efforts.

The Plan Process

While the Plan process has always been at the heart of the Bennington academic experience, the very nature of its particularity has made it historically resistant to definitive articulation. During the 2007–08 academic year, partly in response to evidence of a growing need to express more clearly the expectations of a Bennington education, a number of faculty members set out to craft guidelines for Plan development. The emphasis was on clean definition of fundamental expectations that would allow students to understand and realize the complementary aims of the College's mission. The resulting "Expectations" document, refined by the Academic Policies Committee and presented to the entire faculty in spring 2008, acknowledges the individualistic and complex relationship between Plan and curriculum. Rather than proscribing general distribution requirements or a particular core curriculum, the guidelines address the broad needs and ends general to all individual Plans and provide guidance for flexible and responsive curriculum development. The guidelines define a set of general aims and basic expectations:

> Bennington expects students to accomplish substantive work in their area(s) of interest as well as to understand that work within a larger historical and contemporary context—a balance representing the tension between breadth and depth that is central to a liberal arts education. Both are essential to achieving the "self-fulfillment" and "constructive social purposes" to which the College has been committed since inception. As such, both objectives are central to the design of an appropriate Plan, the students' self-defined trajectory through Bennington.

Overarching Aims:
- We begin with the premise that students come to us with diverse learning styles and capacities.
- We aim to build upon these styles and capacities to develop, in each student, a body of fundamental skills.
- These skills can be applied in multiple contexts; we expect students to explore this breadth of application in sophisticated and integrative ways.
- By the time they graduate, students should be able to work individually and collaboratively, demonstrating the capability to act creatively and effectively.

Fundamental expectations:

The list of basic expectations is intended to be succinct, universal, easily integrated into institutional structures, linkable to curriculum, and simple to assess. It will also be, necessarily, broad. The five categories below are best seen as a spectrum rather than as discrete classes. Each might be realized in sophisticated work in most or all disciplines; however, we reemphasize that students should not limit their application to a single discipline. Student Plans will, in time, address how their work has brought these expectations to bear on their particular pursuit. These are tools and approaches that should become familiar and standard practice for all students, whatever their particular focus:
- Formulating an inquiry
- Identifying, analyzing, and using resources

- Creating and revising work
- Demonstrating and defending work
- Connecting work to broader contexts

During the 2009–10 academic year, these "Expectations" will be integrated into the Plan process.

As with expectations for Plan development (and for similar reasons), advanced work guidelines have historically resisted definitive articulation. During the 2007–08 academic year, as part of its work on the "Expectations" document, the Academic Policies Committee requested that faculty discipline groups once again review guidelines for advanced work and submit them for review and discussion. APC's request was, in part, a response to reported student confusion and concern about guideline clarity. While APC agreed the discipline guidelines for advanced work should be demystified, it also recognized that guidelines should explicitly articulate the importance of fluidity among the disciplines and stress that students are not being urged into a rigid "major-like" structure. Recognizing the risks of such guidelines becoming strictures, APC argued that they can be useful in assisting Plan committee members without binding them. The guidelines are necessarily considered as a beginning—not a culminating—point for student Plans. Further, APC expressed concern that a student Plan with a multi-discipline focus not be subject to multiple guidelines but rather have an individually developed definition of advanced work. APC's discussions with faculty will continue into the 2009–10 academic year. We anticipate that a draft document will be discussed with the full faculty in the fall of 2009.

While the Plan process works extraordinarily well for many students, some struggle to find the through-line inquiries that will shape their academic program. We want every student to experience the richest possible education at Bennington. The "Expectations" document and the advanced work guidelines represent the efforts of the faculty and administration to effect that aim.

Given the deliberate absence of set curricular paths for students to follow in creating their Plans, the role of the faculty advisor is critical. Recent research conducted by the provost and dean confirmed the centrality of advising as the lynchpin of the Plan process. Faculty members and students agree on the importance of the advising relationship. They also agree there is unevenness in advising. Advising can markedly enhance and support students' experiences with the Plan process; conversely, it may also impede or confuse the process. In response to these concerns, we are introducing two full-time first-year advisors intended to support students as they begin their Bennington education. (A more complete description of the role of the first-year advisors appears in the projection section of retention and graduation in Standard Six.)

We have also focused our efforts on students who are clearly in jeopardy. In 2005, after the College closely examined academic histories of students who had withdrawn and found that they were highly likely to have been on probation, the Faculty Advising Committee decided to give special support to faculty advisors of these students. The committee meets at the beginning of each term with all students on probation and separately with their faculty advisors to review individual situations and to share common strategies for working with students at risk. Faculty members have expressed appreciation for this support. Since students on concern status are one step closer to probation, the committee also reviews this group at midterm. Typically, the committee decides if a conversation with the faculty advisor or with the student is warranted. In all cases, the dean's office works closely with the committee to collaborate on monitoring the students and intervening as needed. Along with the addition of full-time first-year advisors to supplement faculty advising, we expect these measures to strengthen the critical relationship between advising and the Plan process.

The Curriculum

In the last five years, the College has worked to engage the faculty more deeply in issues relating to overall institutional effectiveness, as directed by the NEASC team after the 2003 focused self-study. Toward that end, in 2003, the Curriculum Planning Committee was formed. It is responsible for the organization, review, and approval of the curriculum, evaluation and approval of tutorials, development of a multi-year curriculum, and coordination of sabbatical replacements and faculty searches. CPC has paid particular attention in recent years to the development of a multi-year curriculum.

Co-chaired by the provost and dean and the associate dean for academic affairs, the faculty members of this appointed committee serve as curriculum coordinators for their respective discipline groups. Coordinators

facilitate discussions of curriculum planning within discipline groups, oversee class schedules, and present proposed curricula to the full Curriculum Planning Committee for approval. Membership evolves with the structure of curricular initiatives or programs. In addition to the representatives of literature, social science, science and mathematics, languages, dance, drama, visual arts, and music, a faculty member serves as the curriculum coordinator for the design labs. While the primary task of the CPC is curricular oversight, the committee has also reviewed and evaluated other policies and procedures relevant to curricular planning. These have included revising course evaluation forms and processes and independent study guidelines, improving the registration process, and working closely with the Student Educational Policies Committee to improve in-class midterm feedback.

Although work remains to be done in developing the Curriculum Planning Committee, it is gratifying at this vantage point of several years following the establishment of the committee to realize what has been accomplished. Over the last five years, we have moved from a fairly decentralized and sometimes erratic development and review of the curriculum to the integration of a fully representative body charged with helping to oversee the construction of the curriculum with disciplinary *and* institutional perspectives. Even in this small college, conversations about the curriculum had become somewhat segregated. Faculty had not considered at length or in an interdisciplinary body the appropriate balance of introductory and more advanced courses, the appropriate spread of courses over the week, the appropriate class sizes for different kinds of classes, and the priority of developing together a viable four-year curriculum. These important topics and others are now routinely addressed in weekly meetings. We have made significant progress in changing the culture of the development of the curriculum as well as changing some specific aspects of access to the curriculum through registration and schedule modifications. The curriculum is now more complete before registration and plan meetings, more balanced in levels of courses, more appropriate in certain class times and credits, and more readable.

New Curricular Initiative: Advancing Public Action

The new curricular initiative has begun to suggest ways to deepen interdisciplinary learning and broaden students' exposure to different modes of thinking and learning. Two modules developed by a mathematics faculty member, for example, have prompted discussion about the potential of this new format for developing a broader-based quantitative reasoning initiative involving a cross-disciplinary approach to the teaching of statistics.

In addition to the regular course evaluation process used for all classes, specific evaluation methods were developed for the design labs and modules and used for the first time during the 2008–09 academic year. Preliminary findings suggest that the module structure worked very well for students and faculty. The tight timeline allowed a focused exploration in specific topics that most students expect to use in future work at Bennington. The faculty enjoyed teaching the courses, discovered ways to bring aspects of the module structure into their regular courses, and benefited from discussing teaching with colleagues. The results from the design lab evaluations were more mixed, perhaps because the stated goals of the labs and the survey we developed did not mesh in the end. The overarching aim of "making a difference in the world" is a difficult thing to measure in the classroom context, we have found, and has prompted the need for more discussion with the faculty about course goals.

Discussions about the curricular initiative have also prompted conversations about physical campus needs. In response, the College will construct a new building that will be the locus of activity for the initiative. The building is being designed as a flexible teaching and learning space, including a conference center, apartments for visiting faculty and practitioners, teaching space for design labs and modules, a faculty lounge, and new offices for the field work term office. To be called the Center for the Advancement of Public Action, the building is scheduled for completion in the 2010–11 academic year.

Field Work Term

Based on annual FWT statistics, responses from surveys of graduating seniors and campus focus groups, and qualitative data from student reflection essays, it appears that students generally value their FWT experiences as an important component of their education. Especially valued by students are goal clarification, increased self-understanding and understanding of others, and development of professional and life management skills.

The primary challenges are tied to financial resources and the academic calendar, both of which can affect the opportunities available to students. Currently two proposals are under consideration—one to reduce mandatory hours over the seven weeks to allow for more flexibility in securing paid jobs, and another to offer a summer option for select students with compelling academic opportunities. Additionally, the brief break between the end

of FWT and the beginning of spring term makes effective reflection on FWT experiences difficult. Two areas for growth are better facilitating of student reflection and recognizing achievement over FWT.

Study Away

The flexibility, variety, and individual approach of study abroad at Bennington are strengths of the program. Students work closely with their faculty advisors, Plan committees, and the study abroad director to explore programs that will best complement the goals of their Plan at Bennington. While we remain open to a variety of study-abroad experiences for our students, we are careful to research all programs to ensure that they meet Bennington's standard of education and individualized student support. We are fortunate to have faculty support for study abroad across all disciplines, and we work closely with the faculty to locate and review programs that will enhance our curriculum and our students' experiences beyond Bennington. Given the support for and variety of study-abroad opportunities, we are committed to increasing student participation in these programs.

Assessment of Student Learning

Lee Schulman, president emeritus of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, recently discussed "low stakes-high yield" assessments, in which institutions employ "measurements that are part of everyday learning and give students 'an intellectual GPS' so they know where they are'" (*Chronicle*, 8.08.08). The College is taking such an approach as we build our assessment capacity from the ground up, making careful, deliberate decisions about methodology and evaluation tools in the context of our educational philosophy and mission.

We recognize the pressing need for assessment on every level. Our six-year graduation rate, for instance (averaging 60 percent over the last 10 years), is unacceptable and has focused attention on the need to understand more fully the causes of our high attrition rates. From the course level (faculty conversations about new curricular initiatives, for example, have focused significantly on developing specific evaluation tools for the design labs and modules) to the institutional level (increased participation in externally administered assessment instruments), Bennington is taking strong strides towards improved assessment.

As we continue to establish a more formal culture of assessment of the academic program, we recognize that our efforts must integrate assessment at the course level, the discipline group or program level, and as part of the Plan process. Given the role of the Plan as both a manifestation of our educational philosophy and a curricular structure, it is particularly valuable to have an in-depth understanding of its effectiveness.

As previously mentioned, recent research conducted by the provost and dean has affirmed faculty and student commitment of the Plan process and also revealed a need for greater clarity and stronger guidance with respect to Plan development and advanced work guidelines. Efforts to address these and other assessments of student needs include:

Course level
- Revision of the student-generated course evaluation form to include questions about course objectives and goals, level of academic challenge, types and level of feedback, and student self-assessment of level of engagement
- Implementation of specialized evaluation tools for design labs and modules

Discipline group/program level
- Establishment of a regular cycle of discipline group/program reviews
- Development of a pilot set of "learning outcomes" for the foreign language discipline group

Plan level
- Creation of the "Expectations" document and its integration into the Plan process
- Renewal of the transcript analysis project, completed in 2003, that reviewed the breadth component of student Plans and the establishment of a regular three-year cycle to continue this monitoring

- Establishment of a process of qualitatively coding first-term reflection essays and senior essays to determine common themes around social and academic experiences
- Ongoing work facilitated by the APC to establish and distribute advanced work guidelines

Additionally, various offices have developed their own surveys or focus groups to discover what students and faculty members think about pressing issues. For example, we routinely administer surveys through the library, the FWT office, and the student life office. Focus groups have been conducted to explore retention issues, Plan process concerns, faculty course evaluation methods, and effectiveness of the field work term. These internally developed efforts have yielded rich information. In this culture of reflection at the College, an eruption of surveys related to improvement of student learning has emerged; we will need to provide more systematic oversight of this sort of local research.

Our recent participation in externally administered assessment instruments promises greater progress in evaluating and improving upon academic effectiveness. The Teagle Foundation grant assessing senior capstone projects will draw together faculty from various disciplines within the College, dovetailing with the ongoing development of advanced work guidelines and enriching faculty discussions in individual fields. Students will benefit by increased faculty consideration of the best measurements for research, critical thinking, and writing.

The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education offers rich possibilities for assessment. To our knowledge, Bennington has never participated in a longitudinal study of this magnitude, and certainly has not administered any test comparable to the critical thinking and defining issues tests that are given at three points during the study. We will be able to mark progress in specific critical thinking and moral reasoning skills at the end of one and four years. Results will give us hard data to drive discussions with the faculty to improve student learning. Participation in the national study situates Bennington in the national debate on these issues and provides us with colleagues and consultants and, eventually, data to increase understanding of our students and develop ways to improve their support and learning outcomes.

Data analysis from these external surveys and internal evaluations and discussions has allowed us to begin taking appropriate action. Initiatives include:

- In response to disappointing scores on the NSSE standard of "Supportive Campus Environment," we instituted a survey to enhance understanding of students' perception and experience of key services. Results include addition of van service to and from Albany train stations and airport, replacing hallway doors in the dean's office to include more inviting glass panels (an initiative reported in an article on NSSE in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*), and expanding staff development opportunities to include a focus on service to students.

- In response to student focus groups, we introduced a new summer program in 2008 to assist first-year students in their transition to college. Additionally, we are expanding dining services operations, researching the possibility of a one-card system, and exploring the expansion of off-campus housing for upper-class students.

- In response to FWT surveys, alumni surveys, and feedback from faculty members discussing the new curricular initiative for public action, we expanded the activities of the FWT office to include career services. We are developing a program for first-year students, to be piloted during FWT 2010, which would address taking full advantage of FWT (historically a challenge in the first year) and developing a sense of community within their cohort and in the greater Bennington community. Also, we are expanding support for faculty to develop short courses taught off-campus during FWT.

- In response to research on the Plan process and information from focus groups, we are planning a new first-year advising system that would include full-time advisors dedicated to working with students from admission to the end of the first year. The proposed program recognizes the centrality of advising in a Bennington education and grows out of a recognized need to support students more vigorously and intentionally during the formative first year of college. Working closely with faculty advisors, the first-year staff advisors would have as their sole emphasis the transition issues faced by first-year students.

- In response to feedback from students and faculty, we revamped our registration process to include a separate period for first-year students and a lottery system for all courses without prerequisites. While the new process has helped streamline the process, challenges remain. Specifically, we need to find fair ways

to respond to "required" courses determined by Plan committees; we need to improve the spread of 2000-level courses across the year in each discipline; we need to make registration for musical instrument study much more efficient; and we need to find better ways to manage the determination of course enrollment maximums.

Graduate and Postbaccalaureate Programs

The MFA in Writing has a long history of success attributable to its sound structural design, thoughtful implementation, strong leadership, and a highly accomplished faculty. A recent review of alumni publication activities indicates that 55 percent of all graduates report that they have published a book, a contribution to a book, or had an essay, poem, or story published in newspapers, magazines, or literary and scholarly journals. Recently, *The Atlantic* magazine named the program as one of the top five low-residency programs in the country.

The struggle for stable enrollments in the graduate teaching programs—BA/MAT, MAT, and MATSL—has led to a thorough assessment of their viability. Recent budget cuts resulting in the elimination of one position in the MAT program should strengthen its financial position without compromising academic quality. Also, while mechanisms have been put into place over the past two years to make the requirements and standards of the BA/MAT and MAT program more transparent, the program continues to face significant recruitment challenges. The MATSL program, having recently met its enrollment targets, will continue to be monitored. One challenge for this program is finding faculty who can model its nontraditional teaching approach with its emphasis on developing linguistic, cultural, and conceptual modes of learning.

The MFA programs in dance and music will continue to be highly selective in recruiting students with an emphasis on creating new work. The postbac program is structured effectively to meet its purposes. We need, however, to increase the quality of applicants and the conversion rate of highly qualified applicants.

Projection

The Undergraduate Program

Discussion and debate about Bennington's self-directed education have dominated the College dialogue since 1932. No doubt those discussions will continue for decades to come. It is part of our culture to engage continually in what educator Ernest Boyer has called "the essential conversation," and what the 2003 NEASC team cited as "the constant reinvention of liberal education." That questioning process represents, as noted by the team, "the essence of the college."

The challenge today is to continue to act more intentionally upon the valuable information we have gathered and will continue to gather from student, staff, and faculty experiences with our academic program. While we greatly value the many anecdotal stories we accumulate about student learning, we are also learning to integrate information from internal and external data collection into our discussions. The strategic plan, the recent work of the Academic Policies and Curriculum Planning Committees, and the faculty's development of new curricular structures demonstrate our commitment to strengthening teaching and learning, coupled with a new responsiveness to evaluation, planning, and decision-making. This section outlines some of our specific plans and goals.

The Plan Process

The Plan process is most powerful when it is understood as an integrative structure *and* an integrative experience. It challenges students to wrangle with complex ideas and synthesize many different learning experiences through a guided, intentional pathway. As noted, however, not all students are as successful as we would hope in understanding the Plan process and developing a plan of studies that fulfills the College's mission and the student's potential. The "Expectations" document will be integrated into the academic life of the College beginning in 2009—distributed to prospective and current students, included in orientation materials and on the website, and used as a guide for Plan meeting preparation and implementation. Advanced work guidelines will progress to discussion with the full faculty during the 2009–10 academic year and become integrated into the academic program as well, but this will likely take more time. Similarly, the first-year advisors' program will continue to be carefully planned during the spring and early summer of 2009 by staff and faculty, joined in July

by the new advisors. The development of a rigorous training program involving faculty and staff will be crucial to its success.

The Curriculum

The Curriculum Planning Committee has made great strides in establishing a curriculum review process and a venue for cross-disciplinary conversation and debate about curricular issues. Nevertheless, there are new challenges to overcome and an evolving set of issues and problems to be resolved. Some of the challenges involve the inevitable tensions that emerge from an historic commitment to a faculty culture that celebrates the individual development of courses, that is engaged in discovering new collaborative ventures, that seeks new ways of addressing student needs, and that acknowledges the need to cover essentials in a discipline and participate in a curriculum that is coherent overall. A related issue involves ongoing discussions about the mix of beginning and advanced courses and the spread of courses over times and days. Additionally, development of a multi-year curriculum should be accelerated in support of students' Plan development. As the College grows, these issues will become more pressing. The time is now to advance these conversations and make needed changes in the development of the curriculum and in access to the curriculum through modifications in the registration process. Therefore, each of these issues will be on the agenda for discussions in multiple groups—the Curriculum Planning Committee and the dean's staff (including the new CIO and the registrar).

To expand the new curricular structures (design labs and modules) to include more first-year students, we will continue to evaluate their effectiveness rigorously. Modified evaluations will be administered in fall 2009 for each course structure and results will be compared with those from 2008 and discussed with the faculty in spring 2010. Equally important to success is engaging more faculty and students in the development of these curricular initiatives, so we intend to meet with representatives from the Student Educational Policy Committee to hear feedback; and we intend to run a focus group on the design labs modeled after the successful one on the course modules in spring 2010. Continuing to develop creative ways to ease time constraints and provide financial support will be key elements in assuring faculty participation.

Two areas of focus in the strategic plan are enhancing undergraduate enrollment through admissions and retention and strengthening the College's mission and market position. The plan calls for the continuing assessment of program and discipline group reviews to determine future curricular directions and resource allocations; the reviews will also be analyzed from the perspective of institutional mission and market position. An example of the potential of this type of analysis is the discussion currently underway as a result of the review of the music program. The strategic plan calls for a shifting of our gender balance to 60 percent female and 40 percent male from our current ratio of 65 percent female and 35 percent male. Electronic music and sound design are two curricular areas that typically attract more male students. Currently, both are staffed by part-time faculty with limited course offerings. If we increased our commitment to electronic music and sound design, could this shift the gender balance as planned? Aggressively integrating the reviews with the goals of the strategic plan is a priority for the coming years. To do this, we will keep the priorities of the strategic plan in mind during summer 2009 as we develop a program review template and craft the framework for the faculty to use. Specifically, we will incorporate a review of course enrollments over time in each program review and we will link this to Plan concentrations data.

Field Work Term

Creative options are being explored for improving the FWT program while ensuring that any changes support the College's mission and retain effective components of the current model. The FWT and career development office is considering ways to facilitate reflection after FWT, given the current academic calendar, through collaborations with other offices and student-led programs. The new full-time, first-year advisors will play an important role in this regard. We will carefully monitor the pilot program for first-year students to determine if it should be expanded and sustained. As FWT continues to evolve, we intend for students not only to gain the life and professional skills that they (and faculty) value, but also to develop a stronger sense of their role and responsibilities as citizens of the world. As part of that aim, a long-term goal is to offer every student the viable option of experiencing an international FWT. Over the next two years we will explore funding opportunities toward that end. Additionally, the FWT director will become more involved with the development of the design labs by meeting with faculty to identify FWT opportunities before the courses begin.

Study Away

Our main goal for the study-away program at Bennington is to increase the number of students studying abroad each year. We believe this will have a positive impact on students' academic experiences and upon our retention rate. To this end, we are engaging students in their first year in conversations about study-away options and the research they can begin to consider, long before they will actually go. Because finances play an important role, we are working with universities abroad to expand the exchange options available to our students (for example, we have just established a program with Rhodes University in South Africa). When students study abroad through another college or a third-party program, their federal financial aid may be applied to the cost, but their institutional aid may not. Through an exchange, Bennington students retain institutional aid, thus making it more feasible for those who are heavily supported through Bennington grants and loans. Finally, we intend to capitalize on the interest in and enthusiasm for the new curricular initiative on advancing public action and to highlight programs for our students that include service components.

Assessment of Student Learning

We plan to develop a variety of ways to assess student learning in addition to the ongoing in-class evaluations and group critiques that currently dominate our student assessment. First, through the Academic Policies Committee, we will clarify each discipline's understanding of advanced work and integrate that understanding into the Plan process, so that faculty can apply relevant guidelines and expectations to students at critical moments of accountability. Second, again through the initiative of the Academic Policies Committee, we will research e-portfolio systems to see if and how they might make sense for Bennington, both as a mechanism to gather work for student records and as a convenient way for faculty advisors and Plan committees to review actual student work, not just evaluations of that work. We have just joined the AAC&U VALUE Project as a participant evaluator school to expand our network and explore working models. Third, we are participating in a multi-year Teagle project that will bring faculty from several colleges together to review and discuss grading of student theses. Following the first group faculty session in May 2009, the participating faculty will share what they have learned at a meeting of the Faculty Supper Club. Fourth, we intend to use results from the Wabash Study in fall 2009, particularly those related to critical reasoning skills, to prompt discussions with the faculty about how we build this into the curriculum. We also will take advantage of the Wabash staff expertise as well as that of other participating colleges to review potential links between the Wabash assessments of student learning and retention. As we develop our new office under the associate provost for planning, research, and assessment, we will incorporate procedures to keep the issue of strengthening student assessment at the forefront.

Graduate and Postbaccalaureate Programs

Given the success of the MFA in Writing, we expect it to continue in its current trajectory. Specific plans are underway to develop fundraising efforts to expand scholarship opportunities, to enhance the program's presence on the College website, and to explore online opportunities for discussion through the College's online course management system.

In contrast, considering the low enrollment numbers, as well as the downward enrollment trend for MAT programs at some comparable colleges, the viability of the MAT program will be monitored over the next years. Bennington remains committed to meeting the needs of the current students.

In the summer of 2008, the MATSL program met its enrollment projections. Nevertheless, in light of past inconsistent enrollment trends, continued assessment of the health of the program is essential. In addition, plans are being developed for the ongoing training of faculty who teach in the program.

No major changes are currently projected for the MFA programs in dance or music. The dance discipline is undergoing a program review during the 2008–09 year that may include recommendations on this issue.

The addition of an admissions counselor for the postbac program should help build and strengthen the pool of applicants and matriculating students. Target enrollment for the program is 10 to 15 students. The dean of admissions, the director of the postbac program, and the provost will meet each term to monitor progress on admissions.

Institutional Effectiveness

In recent years, Bennington has intentionally moved to a more explicit engagement with assessment of our academic program. Utilizing internal and external methods, we are gathering and interpreting both qualitative and quantitative evidence of student learning. From the establishment of a regular cycle of administration of the NSSE instrument to the coding of student reflective essays, from the participation in the Wabash study to ongoing surveys of alumni, FWT experiences, and library users, we are committed to deepening our understanding of student learning and applying that knowledge to improve our students' academic experience. Our challenge for the future will be to refine data-gathering knowledge and skills; involve more members of our community, particularly the faculty, in the evaluation process; and continue to explore ways in which Bennington can learn from, and contribute to, the ongoing national conversation about assessment.

STANDARD FIVE: FACULTY

Introduction

Bennington's teacher-practitioner model, adopted at the College's inception in 1932 and reaffirmed as part of the restructuring of the College in 1994, is an essential component of the College's mission: scientists, scholars, writers, and artists, active in their fields, develop and share their work with students in the classroom. From lab assistance in faculty research to performance projects as a prelude to professional productions, students encounter faculty members' professional activities in multiple ways.

Bennington students are expected to study broadly, exploring a range of questions and modes of inquiry and progressing to advanced work in at least one area of study. Faculty, conversely, engage students in their own work, but within the context of a wide-ranging liberal arts education. Academic advising, interdisciplinary initiatives, and long-range curricular planning, among other activities, constitute each faculty member's participation in the development of College-wide academic goals and policies. Faculty discipline groups assume many essential administrative functions, including oversight of guest speaker series, production and capital expense budgets, faculty searches, curricular development, and review of graduate applicants, where appropriate.

Description

Faculty Categories, Size, and Qualifications

In the academic year 2008–09, the full-time equivalent (FTE) for Bennington's faculty is 72, which includes 62 full-time faculty, 8 faculty members who teach full-time or one term each, and 8 faculty members contracted on a part-time basis.

Additionally, 11 instructors of instrumental music are hired on an hourly basis and 3 instructors are hired with annual contracts in the specific practice areas of writing composition and dance practices. Technical support staff in visual arts and music occasionally offers two-credit materials/process courses. When their experience in the field permits, graduate students in the performing arts offer technique-based classes under the supervision of regular faculty.

The low-residency MFA program in writing employs a separate faculty consisting of 28 prominent writer-teachers, while the Master of Arts in Teaching a Second Language (MATSL) and postbaccalaureate premedical programs engage additional faculty on a contract basis for summer classes. No additional faculty are engaged for MFA programs in the performing arts.

While class sizes at the College have grown slightly in the past few years as enrollment has increased, the student/faculty ratio has ranged between 7:1 and 9:1 (currently 9:1), ensuring more than sufficient faculty resources for instruction.

As teacher-practitioners, Bennington's faculty members' qualifications are based on professional portfolios as writers, researchers, and artists, in addition to advanced degrees. Seventy-three percent of full-time, regular faculty members hold doctorate or other terminal degrees. Faculty in the natural sciences, mathematics, and social sciences (including history and philosophy) all hold doctorates. The College's faculty recruiting and faculty performance review processes ensure that professional work is ongoing and critically considered in appropriate external venues.

Bennington's faculty includes 62 percent men, 38 percent women, 5 percent of international origin, and 14 percent racial minority.

Faculty Expectations: Teaching, Advising, Professional Work, Community Service

Teaching

In general, full-time faculty members teach five courses per year. Course loads for part-time faculty members are individually contracted. Some faculty in the Isabelle Kaplan Center for Languages and Cultures cover multiple levels of language study and have a greater course load, a reduced student advising obligation, and more limited professional obligations.

Bennington's teacher-practitioner model affords faculty the opportunity to bring developing interests and research into the classroom. Faculty members are encouraged to propose new courses that reflect their interests and to refresh ongoing course offerings as their professional work evolves and shifts. The undergraduate curriculum is organized by discipline groups that include literature, social sciences, science and mathematics, languages, dance, drama, visual arts, and music.

Faculty members work collaboratively within and across discipline groups to design and develop curricular offerings that support students' entry into particular disciplines along with courses that support advanced work. All faculty members teach beginning as well as advanced students. Tutorials—courses designed to meet emerging needs of students individually or in small groups—also serve as a vehicle for advanced work, particularly for disciplines in which staffing does not permit regular offering of a wide array of advanced classes. Senior theses are treated as individual tutorials. Tutorials are typically offered in addition to the standard five-course load.

Curriculum coordinators—faculty members appointed from within each discipline group by the provost and dean and given a stipend—provide a formal linkage between administration and faculty groups. Coordinators facilitate discussions of short- and long-term curriculum planning within groups, oversee class schedules, and present proposed curricula to the full Curriculum Planning Committee (CPC) for approval. As members of CPC, coordinators also facilitate discussions within their discipline groups regarding the use of sabbatical replacements to diversify and broaden curricular offerings. Coordinators are responsible for assisting new and visiting faculty with course submissions and course schedules.

Faculty discipline groups assess the work of students concentrating in their discipline areas and confer at pivotal moments each term to share observations about individual student's coursework and projects. In some cases, discipline groups oversee formal reviews of student Plans and work or develop specific seminars for students with Plans in their area; for instance, visual arts schedules formal reviews and natural sciences conducts interviews with students presenting Plans. Results of visual art reviews and information gathered in science interviews is passed to the Plan committees through written documentation in the first case and through Plan committee members in the second.

Faculty members also schedule weekly or bi-weekly discipline group gatherings of students, faculty, and interested community members (dance workshop, music workshop, social science colloquium, literature gathering, drama forum, science workshop) for regular presentations of student and faculty work, guest speakers, and special workshops. In many cases, students are expected to present their work at discipline gatherings.

Advising

Full-time faculty members serve as advisors to entering and advanced students (averaging 14 advisees), reserving office hours to meet weekly with new students and on an as-needed basis with advanced students. The advising role is detailed in Standard Four. In addition to their work with individual advisees, faculty play a critical role in the Plan process as Plan committee members for students other than their advisees, offering perspectives and judgments from within and outside the students' area of concentration. Faculty members typically serve on 14 or 15 Plan committees each term; this involves reviewing the student's file, meeting with the student and committee, conferring with the student's advisor and other committee members about the student's progress, and helping to determine the status of the student's continuing program at the College.

Professional Work

Assessment of professional currency and activity is a critical component of faculty review. The standards for appropriate activity are addressed individually depending on discipline and individual expectations.

Community Service

Faculty members are citizens of the larger College community, engaging with students, prospective students, staff, families, alumni, and visitors in a variety of settings. The expectation for service and participation outside the classroom is met through elected or appointed committee work, serving on search committees, mentoring new faculty, presenting one's professional work to the community, participating in off- and on-campus alumni events and parent events, among many other campus and local community opportunities.

Professional Development

The expectation of ongoing scholarship, research, and creative activities by faculty is supported by a variety of College resources.

The College, through the office of the provost and dean, provides faculty grants each term to a maximum of $1,200 to support faculty in their professional work outside of the College, including demonstrations of their work and attendance at professional conferences to present papers or participate significantly in professional activities. Normally, 30 to 34 grants are awarded each year.

Full-time faculty who have completed six years of teaching are eligible for paid sabbaticals, granted by the provost and dean upon recommendation of the Academic Policies Committee. Faculty members may choose to apply for either one term at full salary or a year of sabbatical leave at 55 percent salary. Faculty may also apply for unpaid leave for professional reasons for up to two terms between sabbaticals without resetting the sabbatical clock.

Two programs instituted in 2006, early sabbatical and Bennington studies leave, offer additional opportunities for professional growth. Eligible faculty (those who have completed three years at Bennington since any previous sabbatical and have been reappointed) may apply for an early sabbatical as a way to take advantage of timely professional opportunities. The Bennington studies leave allows an eligible faculty member to become a Bennington student for a term while continuing with student advising and any ongoing committee obligations. Early sabbaticals and Bennington studies leaves are competitively awarded grants. During the 2008–09 academic year, two early sabbaticals and one Bennington studies leave were awarded.

Faculty also can be granted permission upon application for brief periods away during the academic term for professional opportunities, providing teaching and advising obligations are otherwise met. The College's academic calendar provides faculty additional research time during the two-month FWT break between terms.

Faculty members have year-round access to labs, studios, library services, and information technologies. Technical staff positions in ceramics, video, digital arts, sculpture, dance and drama, sound design and recording, and science and mathematics provide faculty support through maintenance and monitoring of spaces, equipment, and student training. An audio-visual coordinator supports media systems within classrooms and performance spaces.

Faculty Contracts and Benefits

Faculty appointments are made by the provost and dean, subject to approval of the president and the board of trustees. While faculty contract lengths are not standardized, new faculty normally receive three-year initial appointments. Subsequent re-appointments are typically longer. The faculty review process is detailed in the faculty handbook (Faculty Performance Review Process and Procedures, page 13) and includes the review process for faculty in the Isabelle Kaplan Center for Languages and Cultures detailing additional criteria and procedures.

The Isabelle Kaplan Center for Languages and Cultures, founded in 1994 as a regional language center, was restructured in 2007 to bring Center faculty more in line with regular Bennington faculty responsibilities and benefits, including advising load, the review process and criteria, voting privileges, and eligibility for sabbatical and leaves of absence.

For all faculty contracts of five years or more, a mid-contract discussion between the faculty member and the provost and dean is scheduled to assess the extent to which expectations, both on the faculty member's side and the College's, are being met.

Full-time faculty contracts specify contract length, salary and payment schedule, and the following language regarding responsibilities: "You will be offering a minimum of five courses each academic year. Your responsibilities will include teaching, academic advising, service to the community in the form of committee work, and participation in a range of routine and special events related to admissions, orientation, and student life, pursuing actively professional interests and integrating your professional activities into your teaching."

Faculty appointments are subject to all College policies applicable during the appointment period and subject to termination for lack of performance of faculty duties, misconduct, changes in educational policy, or financial exigency.

To attract and retain an appropriately qualified faculty, the College has made a significant commitment to increased faculty salaries. Beginning in academic year 2003–04, salaries have increased at an annual average rate of 5.4 percent, in contrast to the national average of 3.3 percent for the same period.

The benefits package for full-time employees includes medical insurance, long-term disability insurance, and retirement plan. The College's contribution varies by salary and the plan selected. Voluntary plans include dental insurance, vision insurance, life insurance and supplemental life insurance, flexible spending accounts for healthcare and dependent care, and adoption assistance. The College also provides for family and medical leave assistance, unpaid faculty leaves, emeritus faculty support, and educational benefits, which are detailed in the faculty handbook (page 61). Detailed benefits documents are available.

Faculty Governance

As noted in Standard Three, faculty members participate in formulating academic policies and practices through election of faculty members to the Academic Policies Committee, the Faculty Performance Review Committee, the Faculty Review Appeals Committee, and the Faculty Committee on Grievances, or by appointment to the Curriculum Planning Committee. Faculty members also participate in numerous appointed standing and *ad hoc* committees, such as the Library and Advising Committees. The composition and workings of these committees are detailed in the faculty handbook. Faculty work within discipline groups is central in determining the shape and direction of the curriculum and academic program.

Recent curricular initiatives have invited faculty to develop interdisciplinary innovations and to link these to active engagement with urgent problems in the world at local, national, and global levels. In 2007, more than 40 percent of the faculty engaged in intensive winter sessions and regular spring term meetings to discuss linkage of these initiatives to the Plan process and advising, development of essential skills and capacities, innovative first-year courses focused on action in the world, a more flexible academic calendar, and a more intensive student orientation experience, among other topics. A number of ideas were adopted from these discussions, including first-year design labs and faculty-led orientation workshops; other projects and procedures continue to be developed and piloted.

Bennington faculty members have recently initiated a series of meetings called Faculty Forum, to discuss issues and questions brought forward from the faculty and to develop and offer proposals, inquiries, and requests to the faculty as a whole and to the administration.

Faculty working in collaboration with administrative staff have participated in updating essential ethical policies, including the plagiarism policy and the policy on research using human subjects, and the development of the Faculty Committee on Grievance. The academic freedom policy reflects the College's commitment to intellectual freedom. The faculty handbook provides details on the policy (page 21).

Faculty Recruitment

The College uses traditional venues for recruiting faculty—primarily advertising in appropriate professional contexts—and also asks members of the community to participate in creative strategies for outreach. Bennington seeks active practitioners who bring to teaching the same order of passion and talent they bring to their practice. The College actively welcomes applications from members of underrepresented groups. Search committee members and chairs, appointed by the provost and dean, include faculty from within and beyond the area of expertise of the position. The committee is responsible for organizing an orderly search in accordance with procedures detailed in the faculty handbook (page 12). Faculty and students are encouraged to participate in

events scheduled for each candidate's visit and to submit comments to the committee. Final committee recommendations for appointment to the faculty are submitted to the provost and dean and to the president for approval prior to final approval by the board of trustees.

Appraisal

Faculty at all levels of experience and length of service at the College reflect the vitality of the teacher-practitioner model, as evidenced in College website feature stories, faculty biographies, and national and international publications, conferences, galleries, and performances.

The creation of the provost and dean position in 2001 has generated a new level of administrative oversight and direction that has clarified faculty responsibilities and supported the ongoing work of the faculty, including initiatives in curriculum organization and academic budget administration and the development of an administrative team for academic activities. New positions in the provost and dean's office include an assistant dean for budget and administration, associate dean for academic affairs, associate dean for academic services (replacing the former dean of studies position), and, most recently, associate provost for planning, research, and assessment. New areas of faculty support generated by these administrative positions include new and visiting faculty orientation, mid-contract reviews, multi-year curriculum planning, centralized oversight of program and capital expense budgets, improved course registration procedures, new faculty grievance structures, a regular faculty handbook review process, and the establishment of a more robust institutional research agenda.

The Curriculum Planning Committee, created by the provost and dean in 2003–04, has become the hub of discipline group communications, curricular organization and facilitation, and multi-year curriculum planning. New structures have been developed for reviewing, approving, and scheduling courses and posting syllabi.

In recent years, collaborative faculty discussions organized by the provost and dean about expectations for student work have created new arenas of open discourse, faculty leadership, and consensus. Faculty have instituted curricular innovations, participated in the development of institutional priorities and procedures, and begun to organize new avenues to air faculty concerns.

Discussions involving more than 40 percent of the faculty, begun in the fall of 2006 with a winter "retreat" in January 2007, helped to build consensus around "what every Bennington student should know/experience" and focus faculty discussions toward the formulation of an "expectations" document. Cross-disciplinary courses (design labs) and new course structures (modules) are current pilot projects in response to ongoing discussions around essential engagement with world issues (fundamental to a liberal arts education) as well as basic student expectations. These initiatives, guided by ongoing assessment tools and supported by sustainable administrative structures, will be developed further. Preliminary evaluations show extremely positive responses from both students and faculty to the three-week module courses with more mixed, but promising, results for design lab courses.

Support structures for instructional technology are being actively developed. Since 2003, 16 mediated classrooms have been brought on-line. An instructional technology manager has been appointed to assist faculty with the effective integration of technology in the delivery of instruction. In addition, new online tools give faculty members access to student records, assisting them in their teaching and advising duties.

Faculty compensation levels have increased for the past six years at an average of 5.4 percent per year; however, we believe more needs to be done to bring benefit packages to competitive levels. In response to a recommendation from the faculty, the College is evaluating comparable benefit packages at peer institutions. New areas of faculty compensation include reduced course load (four courses) for new faculty hires in their first year of teaching, compensation or reduced course load for faculty serving as curriculum coordinators, stipends provided for faculty participating in committee work and "retreat" sessions, and compensation for faculty involved in the development of design labs and modules. Unfortunately, the recent economic downturn has necessitated freezing faculty and staff salaries and limiting compensation for curriculum development.

The College has taken steps in recent years to improve racial and cultural diversity of our faculty through targeted advertising, increased usage of sabbaticals and leave opportunities to diversify faculty, and consistent

encouragement and monitoring of cultural and racial diversity in the search process and curriculum development process. The dance program in particular has implemented a world cultures guest artist program. From the period of 2004 to 2008, our efforts have resulted in an increase of ethnic diversity from 4 to 14 percent. In the same period, the percentage of minority applicants invited to campus as finalists in faculty searches increased from 18 to 30 percent.

Projection

The College will continue to seek ways to deepen faculty engagement in curriculum development and innovation, to support effective teaching and advising practices, to facilitate the professional liveliness of our faculty, and to bring more diversity to faculty and curriculum. Specific initiatives include:

- Continue to provide incentives, either financial or through course relief, for the development and delivery of first-year interdisciplinary courses, faculty collaborations, and other curricular innovations.

- Develop a schedule for the implementation of comprehensive instructional and information technologies that support classroom teaching, regular advising functions such as access to student records, and effective, secure online communications for curricular planning and other daily faculty functions.

- Explore new recruiting procedures to support a more racially and culturally diverse faculty, including targeted searches to new audiences, strategic invitations for on-campus interviews, and established goals for sabbatical replacements, visiting faculty residencies, and guest speakers. We will investigate Fulbright Scholar options and emerging opportunities with our new study-abroad exchange with Rhodes University in South Africa for possible sabbatical and leave replacements.

- Continue to pursue increases in faculty compensation levels and benefits, dependent on enrollment increases and financial realities.

Institutional Effectiveness

The College's commitment to the teacher-practitioner model requires the rigorous participation of numerous constituencies in the faculty performance review process, including students, faculty colleagues, outside professionals, the provost and dean, and the president. The review process itself is periodically assessed and amended to ensure that it reflects current practices. The faculty performance review process, established by the board of trustees in 2000, was amended in 2004 to bring the election of committee members in line with other faculty election procedures. The policy was fully re-assessed in 2008–09.

Ongoing assessment of the academic program includes program reviews undertaken by the faculty of each discipline area at the College, overseen by the provost and dean. Instituted in 2003, all discipline groups are scheduled for a self-study within a ten-year cycle. Feedback from the reviews, including from outside reviewers, allows discipline groups to consider long-range curricular planning and organization in developing or refining their mission.

An annual review of College policies, newly instituted, ensures that handbooks for faculty, staff, and students are regularly updated to reflect current practices. The annual review is conducted by the associate dean for academic affairs, the dean of students, and the director of human resources.

STANDARD SIX: STUDENTS

Introduction

A Bennington education—Bennington College itself—holds several principles in creative tension: freedom and responsibility, individuality and community, independence and collaboration, reflection and action, rigor and flexibility. Bennington aims to create for our students a culture of excellence and resilience guided by an impulse toward meaning and truth. We seek students who are curious, creative, reflective, able to assume responsibility for their education, and oriented towards active community participation. As our commencement statement asserts, "We believe that these educational goals are best served by demanding of our student's active participation in the planning of their own programs, and in the regulation of their own lives on campus." Commensurate with that philosophy, we strive to foster an environment that reinforces the fundamental connections between academic and residential life.

For clarity, Standard Six is divided into three sections: admissions, retention and graduation, and student services, each with its own description, appraisal, and projection sections.

Description

Admissions

Bennington's applicant pool reflects our position as a national and international institution. We seek applicants with a range of interests, who are capable of intelligent and responsible use of the academic and personal freedom the College offers. We look for students who present a well-balanced program of study in high school and whose interview, essays, transcripts, recommendations, and test scores indicate self-motivation and the capacity to engage successfully in a Bennington education.

The admissions process aims to initiate the kind of thinking that lies at the heart of a Bennington education. To that end, the process is designed as a conversation—reflected in the application interview; in campus tours, conducted one-on-one or in small groups; in the integral role of current students in the admissions process, including email discussions with prospective students; and in ongoing, focused training of the admissions staff.

Bennington uses the Common Application with a required supplement. The supplement requests an additional essay and submission of a graded academic paper. We also invite prospective students to submit supplemental materials (artwork or writing, for example) that allow candidates to highlight specific aspects of their academic work. While interviews are not required, they are strongly recommended. Interviews are offered prior to application, and the office of admissions contacts a substantial portion of the applicant pool to conduct phone interviews or arrange in-person interviews in various cities (e.g. Boston, L.A., San Francisco, New York, Chicago, D.C.). The admissions committee takes a holistic approach to each application, looking at all aspects of a candidate's records and work. We look for signs of curiosity, academic rigor, and creativity, as well as integrity, maturity, and respect and concern for others.

Accepted students may defer for up to one year. Bennington does not give credit for advanced placement or life experience. In some cases, students may petition the dean's office after one term for credit through the International Baccalaureate (IB) program or A-level exams. Students who have achieved a certain level of proficiency in a given subject may appeal directly to faculty for exemption from certain prerequisites.

Transfer students enter in fall or spring terms. For transfer applicants, the admissions process additionally requires transcripts from all postsecondary institutions and recommendations from at least two recent faculty members. Decisions about transfer credits are made through the office of admissions at the time of admission.

Students wishing to enter Bennington before completing high school may apply for early entrance. The standards for acceptance are quite high. Applicants must demonstrate outstanding intellectual capacity and the personal characteristics required to make them successful college students.

Because we depend so heavily on tuition revenue in our annual budget, Bennington practices a need-aware admissions policy. Roughly 80 percent of students receive some form of financial aid, which comes in the traditional form of grants, scholarships, loans, and work study. Once admissions decisions have been made, the dean of admissions works closely with the director of financial aid to determine financial aid awards.

Financial aid reporting to the dean of admissions has now shifted from a need-blind to a need-aware approach to determining financial aid awards. The close connection of these areas has promoted a more refined understanding of awards on both parts (admissions and financial aid). The change has also promoted more refined enrollment models.

Appraisal

Admissions

Over the past decade, Bennington has regained and sustained our competitive market position with regard to attracting a robust applicant pool. In recent years, the College has reached milestone inquiry and application numbers. As recently as five years ago, our final inquiry number was 10,000 and our application number was 800; our comparable figures for the fall 2009 class are 12,860 and 1058. In addition, Bennington has begun to rebuild key relationships in several core metropolitan markets, most notably New York City. Our admissions and communications efforts have been carefully designed to create an individualized admissions process, including a high-quality experience for visitors, an emphasis on student interviews, and web and print communications that accurately reflect and reveal the trajectories of a Bennington education.

In the fall 2007 cycle, applications from first-time students totaled 1,010, a significant increase over the previous high of 842 achieved in the fall 2004 cycle. That number has increased to 1,058 for the fall 2009 cycle. Fall 2007 first-time student enrollment at 201 tied the previous high (in fall 2004) and fall 2008 enrollment at 189 was the third highest in recent memory. This increase in student enrollment has been accomplished without any decline in several indicators of academic quality. Among students enrolling in fall 2008, 31 percent were in the top tenth of their high school graduating class and 80 percent were in the top quarter of their class. These are the best numbers the College has seen in the last six years. This was also true of SAT scores (620-720 reading and 560-660 math) for fall 2008 first-time students. The numbers for students entering in fall 2007 were just slightly below those of fall 2008. SAT scores of admitted students in 2009 are 610-720 reading and 560-650 math.

There is room to improve, however, especially in the area of inquiry conversion—the percentage of prospective students who inquire and then apply. Building on our success over the last several years, along with the emergence of new technologies, we can now initiate our individualized approach with more students at earlier moments in their college search. In addition, we are committed to expanding the number of students of color who apply and matriculate. Consequently, we are developing a more aggressive recruitment strategy abroad for international students and domestically for a more diverse population.

The reporting structure change of financial aid to the dean of admissions has been positive allowing us to take a much more strategic approach to financial aid. Strides have been made to normalize the collection and presentation of data. New enrollment models are necessary to make more refined enrollment projections and to control the financial aid discount rate.

Projection

Admissions

Our enrollment plan assumes that we will increase our applicant pool from 1060 for the fall 2008 cohort to 1400 for the fall 2012 cohort. Doing so will allow us to become more selective and to control for different variables within the pool, with a focus on improving indicators related to diversity. In particular, we hope to increase racial diversity from the six- to seven-percent range to the nine- to ten-percent range. (See Standard 11 for expanded admissions projects regarding diversity.) With regard to gender, the entering class for fall 2008 was 65 percent female/35 percent male. Although we reverted to a 70/30 split with the fall 2009 cohort, we hope to bring our gender balance closer to 60/40 over the next five years.

To increase applications, we plan to focus primarily on converting our current inquiry pool more effectively, rather than on trying to grow the inquiry pool itself. In particular, we have emphasized a regional strategy for recruitment that combines deepening our connection in traditionally strong areas, such as New York, Boston, and California (where we currently have regional admissions representatives) with opening up new areas for recruitment, such as international schools and the southern and southwestern parts of the country. Finally, we are developing a number of new technological tools that will allow admissions counselors to improve one-on-one communication with applicants. We will evaluate these tools in summer 2010. We also anticipate that the development of the curricular offerings in public action will have a positive impact on our inquiry and applicant pool.

Description

Retention and Graduation

Since Bennington's founding, numerous national cultural factors have affected retention (women leaving to get married, WWII, the cultural trends of the 1960s, for example). But there has also been a remarkable consistency in our overall retention trend: Between 40 and 50 percent of students leave the College before graduating. While this history is not unique to Bennington, in recent years many peer institutions have begun to change their retention patterns.

In the last 10 years, on average, 62 percent of Bennington students who began as first-term freshmen graduated within six years. During the same period, on average, only 75 percent of students return to Bennington after their first year. Among our peers, in comparison, the average freshman retention rate is 85 percent and the average six-year graduation rate is 71 percent. While Bennington has begun to address this issue, we believe that we can, and must, do a better job at retaining those students who have the potential to be successful at Bennington.

Appraisal

Retention and Graduation

Gaining a better understanding of retention issues and initiating steps to address them are priorities, as demonstrated in the strategic plan. Accordingly, additional staff time has been devoted to institutional research, including retention reports, and initiatives have been developed to study the issues.

In 2005, after reviewing records of withdrawn students between fall 1998 and spring 2003, a retention study was compiled. This report indicated that half of all students who transferred to another college chose a much larger college, that lack of academic progress was a significant indicator for withdrawal, that there was no correlation between SAT scores and withdrawal, that "personal" reasons were often cited as part of the withdrawal decision (frequently health issues), that a correlation existed between students who took a leave of absence and those who later withdrew, that there was no significant correlation between high-aid and withdrawn students, and that "quiet" housing areas on campus tended to correspond to lower withdrawal rates.

In early 2006, a detailed analysis of the larger number of students than usual (36) who withdrew between fall 2005 and spring 2006 revealed that 80 percent withdrew during one of their first three terms; that a disproportionately high number of involuntary withdrawals were male; that the major reasons given by students tended to be personal (emotional issues, need for time to plan future, change in personal circumstances), location/size of college, and community/social; and that more than half of the withdrawn students came from outside the New England region.

In spring 2006, an enrollment management consultant was hired to report on enrollment and retention. The consultant noted that FWT is particularly disruptive for first-year students; that academic advising worked well but could be improved, given its crucial role; that there was not a strong sense of community among students; that it was vital to continue addressing the isolation of students; that attention should be given to discovering why some males stay and others leave; that we should focus on establishing stronger community support systems for

students; that inefficient administrative systems, especially the registration process, frustrated students; and that data collection was essential in moving forward.

In spring 2007, in a small group tutorial called "Senior Lives," led by a faculty member in psychology and the former dean of studies, a group of students developed an interview to give to several of their peers. Part of the interview explicitly addressed the tendency of Bennington students to weigh staying versus leaving throughout their time at the College. The interviews revealed the pervasive difficulties of living in a small, isolated community and illuminated other challenging aspects of the Bennington experience, including the imbalance of the gender ratio. Students identified with houses, not with classes (freshmen, sophomore), which divided the larger community into smaller communities. In addition, because the College is small, each student departure through withdrawal had a significant impact on the social fabric.

In recent years, the provost and dean, dean of admissions, and dean of students have conducted additional focus groups to investigate retention issues. Students have expressed concern about inconsistent advising, confusion about the Plan, and how the small size of the community can both positively and negatively affect the academic and social experience.

A preliminary review of a project focused on alumni perspectives of race at Bennington suggests that although selected alumni experienced some challenges related to race, their overall experience was not negative. Because this work sparked a great deal of interest, funding was provided to continue and expand the project.

Results from four years of the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) indicate improvement is needed to provide a more supportive campus environment. We have just begun to administer the Beginning College Student Survey of Engagement (BCSSE). First-year students and seniors are required to complete reflection essays in which they provide specific information about their experiences at Bennington. Although these essays are read by most senior staff members, information from these essays has not been effectively evaluated.

Projection

Retention and Graduation

Improving retention is a priority in the strategic plan currently being developed. We have set goals of achieving a six-year graduation rate of 70 percent and a first-year retention rate of 83 percent by 2014. The data confirm that the most serious attrition problem is between the first and second year, although the problem persists during the following three years. Accordingly, our plan includes significant emphasis on the first year as well as strategies to support students throughout their academic careers.

Recent research indicates that focusing attention on the needs of first-year students increases their likelihood of success. Information from the National Academic Advising Association indicates that a "split model" of advising, one that involves faculty and staff, in which the focus is on a particular sub-group of students (i.e., students at risk, first-year students) can improve their chances for academic success.

In 2008, we initiated a required first-year weekly time for faculty/student advising meetings. While it is too early to assess its impact fully, we have seen a slight increase in the first-year retention rate (79.1 percent for fall 2007 cohort versus 76.4 percent for fall 2006). A more concerted effort to support first-year students will aim at decreasing first-year attrition.

Accordingly, we have hired two full-time first-year advisors beginning in fall 2009. Each advisor will work with first-year students in collaboration with peer mentors and faculty advisors from the time of admissions through the completion of the first year. The advisors will serve as guides to the academic and non-academic resources of the College. They will provide, in effect, a kind of home base for the students. They will participate in an extensive training program to provide them with essential knowledge about the curriculum, faculty, field work term, community life, Plan process, and transitional issues specific to first-year students. This training will be designed and conducted by staff and faculty and will begin in summer 2009 and continue throughout the first year, with periods of assessment built into the process in January and June 2010.

Further, we are developing a pilot program for FWT 2010 that would enable a group of first-year students to remain on campus during FWT. This initiative addresses the disruption students experience in pursuing off-campus internship opportunities. Thirty students will work in the local community and participate in faculty-led workshops on campus. The program will be evaluated and, if successful, may be expanded. During spring term 2009, a consultant from the "Bringing Theory to Practice Project" of AAC&U began helping us develop the program and he will continue throughout the fall. We will also follow up during summer 2009 on initial contacts with Wagner College to learn from their successes with partnering in their local New York community.

As described in the academic and student services sections below and in Standard Four, efforts are underway to address confusion about the Plan process, feelings of isolation, and the need for a stronger sense of community. These efforts include articulating greater clarity about the Plan and advanced work, expanding transportation and meal plan options, and developing additional intramural and leadership activities. The Academic Policies Committee will work with the provost and dean's office to develop new materials about the Plan process, particularly clarifying advanced work. Beginning in fall 2009, all new students will receive the document, "Expectations of a Bennington Education," and these expectations will be incorporated into Plans in the following year. The faculty will lead discussions on the "Expectations" during the 2009–10 year.

In fall 2009, a synopsis of the results of the study on alumni perspectives on race will be shared with the community. The office of student life will initiate discussions based on questions that emerge from the project, starting with the diversity climate in the houses.

We will also continue to expand efforts to institutionalize data collection. The reconfigured Institutional Research Committee and the newly created position of associate provost for planning, research, and assessment will provide deeper understanding of the student experience and inform decision-making by participating in program reviews, by reviewing data from fall 2009 studies (Wabash, NSSE, Research Practices), and by continuing to develop and implement assessments of the design labs, modules, first-year advisors, and the first-year field work term pilot program.

Description

Student Services
Academic Services
In concert with the College's philosophy and pedagogy, we have developed an array of academic support services to help students succeed at Bennington.

The associate dean for academic services provides oversight on a range of academic services: the Plan process and academic advising; the field work term and career development; advising support for students on probation and academic concern; study-abroad advising and support; scholarship/fellowship opportunities; and grants for conferences. Most of these services are detailed in Standard Four. The dean's office also provides support for students with learning and other disabilities.

Advising support is central to the Plan process. All students are assigned a faculty advisor with whom they meet continually throughout their time at Bennington. Advisors meet with students in one-on-one conversations and sometimes in small groups. As advisors, faculty members are both mentors and guides. They oversee the unfolding of the Plan process by helping students to discover and develop their distinctive intellectual passions to shape an education of depth, breadth, and rigor.

A peer mentoring program complements faculty advising. Peer mentors are trained upper-class students who work with new students during their first term to assist in the transition to college and to the academic life at Bennington. All new students meet in small groups with peer mentors, who supplement faculty advising by offering the additional perspective of fellow students, active in the campus community and with experience in charting the course of their own education.

Writing is a central component of a Bennington education; in addition to papers and projects, students must articulate their goals throughout the Plan process in a series of written essays. Student writing tutors, with

oversight by a literature faculty member, are available to work with students in their academic writing and research skills. Students may also opt for writing classes in composition fundamentals, style, and non-fiction.

The field work term and career development office (FWT/CD) provides a range of services (described more fully in Standard Four). In addition to traditional career development support through one-on-one counseling and group workshops, the FWT/CD office, in collaboration with the student life and external relations offices, plans and implements an annual conference for graduating seniors prior to the start of their final term. Additionally, FWT and student life staff members conduct a series of programs for sophomores in their fourth term, following the pivotal third-term Plan committee meetings.

The registrar has overall responsibility for student records, in accordance with federal guidelines and law. The College follows the standards of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), as amended, to protect the privacy of educational records, establish students' rights to inspect their records, and provide guidelines for correcting inaccurate or misleading data. Each year, FERPA guidelines are reviewed, updated, and published in the student handbook and on the website. Current student records are securely kept in the registrar's office, available only to authorized individuals. The College maintains student records permanently, including the admission application, final course evaluations, and Plan materials. Transcripts (which include all final course evaluations and grades if applicable, as well as FWT evaluations and grades), maintained separately, are also permanently kept.

Student Affairs

Commensurate with the College's mission, the office of student life is committed to fostering a dynamic, safe, and respectful living/learning environment. The development of life skills, the ability to make a successful transition into and out of college, and the capacity to govern oneself within a community are critical aspects of a Bennington education.

The staff of the student life office includes the dean of students, four assistant directors, a coordinator of recreation, a part-time assistant, and an assistant to the dean of students. At the end of each term, the student life staff participates in a process that includes an evaluation of programs and initiatives of the prior term, planning for the upcoming term, and ongoing staff mentoring and training. Throughout the year, staff members attend conferences and workshops specific to their areas of responsibility. Ongoing professional development also takes place through individual staff mentoring and in staff retreats.

Beginning in 2004, the office of student life became part of the office of the provost and dean. The dean of students serves as a member of the provost and dean's staff group along with the associate provost for planning, research, and assessment; associate dean for academic services; associate dean for academic affairs; and assistant dean for budget and administration.

Residential Life

Student self-governance has been a hallmark of a Bennington education since the College's founding in 1932. Mirroring our pedagogy, we foster an environment of inquiry and dialogue in our approach to community living. Bennington is committed to sustaining a culture of accountability that promotes students' ability to articulate community concerns when they arise and to work with others towards a collective solution.

As a residential college, Bennington requires undergraduate students to live in College housing as long as space is available (98 percent live on campus). There are 19 on-campus houses and one off-campus theme (cooperative living) house. All residences are co-ed. Of the on-campus residences, 13 were built when the College was founded and each has one faculty apartment attached. Six houses are more contemporary, three built in 1968 and three in 2001. Each house holds 25 to 38 students and has kitchen facilities and common areas. Student rooms have one phone and data line per resident in addition to wireless access. Most seniors and juniors live in single rooms.

Residential governance centers on house chairs, undergraduates selected and trained by the student life staff in collaboration with other College staff. Two students in each house work with residents to assist in creating a healthy, safe, and supportive environment. At the beginning of each term, house chairs facilitate an expectations agreement for communal living. They also host a weekly coffee hour, in which students convene for academic and

community updates, to discuss house issues, and for fun. An electronic newsletter sent to students during FWT and summer includes dates and deadlines, noteworthy information, and faculty/staff/administrative updates.

Orientation

Prior to new students' arrival on campus, the College provides support to assist in the transition. We provide an informative digital notebook for new students and offer pre-orientation trips. On average, 27 percent of the incoming class participates in these trips. Beginning with the fall 2009 incoming class, full-time first-year advisors also will provide support to new students.

House chairs, peer mentors, faculty, and staff participate in the planning and implementation of orientation, which includes faculty workshops and presentations, information sessions on student life issues, performances, and class bonding experiences. New students receive a guide created in collaboration with current students that provides information about each house community, area resources, a glossary of Bennington-specific terms, and help navigating the campus. A brief program for parents takes place on arrival day.

International student orientation takes place prior to new student orientation. International students at Bennington are sponsored on F-1 visas (non-dependent students). The office of student life provides assistance to international students relating to Department of Homeland Security and the Student and Exchange and Visitor Information System.

Student Governance, Activities, and Conduct

Students participate actively in the creation and enforcement of structures that govern the College's nonacademic life. Through committee work and collaboration, they join with faculty members and administrators to create a culture informed by tolerance and respect for individual differences, self-discipline, and a commitment to the common good. Several advisory organizations allow student input on governance decisions, demonstrating the College's belief that participating in governance engenders student responsibility and self-discipline.

The Student Educational Policies Committee (SEPC) comprises two students from each discipline, elected by their peers to represent the student body on academic issues. SEPC representatives serve as liaison among students, faculty, and administration. The SEPC coordinates mid- and end-of-term course evaluations. The SEPC also considers and articulates larger questions of academic policy.

Student Council is the governing body for all non-academic student issues. Representatives are elected by each house and a leadership structure includes committee chairs (5) and a student head.

Student organizations provide opportunities for leadership and engagement with the broader campus and local communities. Activities often complement academic work and curricular collaborations. The Program Activity Council, with eight to ten student members, plans and implements student activities. The student life office sponsors a multicultural arts performance series featuring international artists. The College offers a range of events available to students and the greater Bennington community free of charge throughout the year. In addition, individual students and groups initiate programs. The student life staff offers assistance to emerging ideas for events or programs. Recent examples include the meditation group, a women's issues group, and a men's game night. A number of events are sponsored by the recreation and athletic program.

Other activities that offer students a chance to shape their community and develop as productive citizens include work as admissions interns, peer mentors, and orientation or career assistants; participation on committees, including the Judicial, Sustainability, and Environmental Initiatives Committees; and board membership on the Student Endowment for the Arts, literary journals, and newspaper. (A comprehensive list of groups and activities is available.) In 2008, 30 percent of the student body participated in one or more of these groups or activities.

Dedicated student space has grown considerably in recent years. Completed in 2006, the Student Center is the primary venue for large-scale social events. It features state-of-the-art sound and lighting equipment and houses two pool tables, a large screen TV, moveable seating, and staging. Immediately adjacent is the Downstairs Café, a small, alternative venue for bands and more intimate performances. The Upstairs Café, a popular gathering space, houses one of the three TVs for open viewing on campus. Commons Lounge has a TV, four public MAC

computers, a piano, and a fireplace. The Meyer Recreation Barn and the faculty dance studio directly above it provide a venue for fitness classes. Students also use space in academic buildings and outside, weather permitting.

The coordinator of recreation, a new position as of fall 2008, oversees the recreation program. Six to eight student recreation assistants broaden the scope and frequency of recreational options, focusing on outdoor, intramural, and fitness-based programs The Meyer Recreation Barn houses an aerobics room, climbing wall, free weights, sauna, and showers, and offers aerobic and weight-training equipment. Bennington participates in a soccer league with colleges from Vermont and Massachusetts. To augment on-campus facilities, we have contracted with the town of Bennington for students to use the community indoor swimming pool and with the North Bennington elementary school to provide a basketball and volleyball venue for students.

Student disciplinary action guidelines are outlined in the annually updated student handbook made available to students at the beginning of each academic year. Alleged infractions of the code of conduct and/or policies listed in the handbook are investigated by the dean of students or an assistant director of student life. Disputed sanctions or serious breaches may be referred to the Judicial or Administrative Review Committees (ARC). The ARC, made up of three senior administrators, hears appeals of the Judicial Committee and cases in which an alleged infraction might result in suspension or expulsion. The Judicial Committee, made up of students, faculty, and staff, hears other cases as referred by the dean of students. Lesser violations are resolved by the dean of students or associate director. Appeals for ARC decisions are heard by the president.

Other Residential Services

The College provides health care and education to students through our health services program. The staff includes a physician and registered nurses; the service is available six days a week with on-call consultation/ referral when the service is closed. The staff provides checkups and physicals, evaluation and management of acute and chronic medical problems, coordination of care with home physicians, health counseling, specialist referrals, some laboratory tests, and prescriptions. Nutritional consultants and gynecological specialists are also available. The services of Southwestern Vermont Medical Center in Bennington are used as needed for emergency care, laboratory tests, x-rays, and specialist consultation.

The psychological services staff includes three licensed psychologists and two psychiatrists. The service is available five days a week and an on-call therapist is available 24 hours a day for students. The staff provides short- or long-term treatment options, opportunities for group work, diagnostic services, and referral for off-campus resources.

The campus safety office is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Campus safety officers serve as a resource to students in need and enforce the rules and regulations outlined in the student handbook. Officers also monitor violations of state laws regarding underage drinking and the use of illegal and controlled substances, all of which violate College disciplinary rules as well. Campus safety works closely with the student life staff. Officers are trained in first aid, AED, CPR, blood-borne pathogens, and fire safety.

All residential students participate in the board plan offered in the Commons dining halls. Meals are served cafeteria style and include three entrees with options for vegetarians and vegans. The Student Center features a snack bar and a convenience store. Four nights a week, beer and wine are available to persons 21 and older with proper ID. Vending machines for snacks and beverages are located throughout the campus.

Appraisal

Student Services

Bennington's commitment to require of students "active participation in the planning of their own programs and in the regulation of their own lives on campus" demands a delicate balance between too little and too much faculty and administrative oversight. Historically, the balance has favored less oversight—it became a badge of honor for students to navigate successfully the considerable challenges of the Plan process, registration, field work term, study-away opportunities, residential life, and the general transition to college. Graduates often spoke proudly of having "survived" a Bennington education.

We have recognized this perception as a major challenge. The obvious link to retention and graduation rates is one reason to effect change; more important, improving the quality of the student experience is paramount. Accordingly, since 2006 we have been making concerted efforts to shift that balance—to complement the mission of a self-guided education with an ethos of support for students at all levels of academic and community services.

We have begun some promising work in gathering and analyzing data to help us address some targeted issues. For example, our work in the last few years with the National Survey of Student Engagement reveals that students who stay make important connections with faculty, but they often feel let down by campus services. That piece of information gave us insight into what we can build on (how to develop the strong faculty-student connection in the Plan process) and on where we need to improve: Could a new first-year advising system help students take advantage of campus services? Could a modified registration system eliminate bureaucratic confusion for students and faculty alike? In addition, initial review of our first-term essay coding project (reviewing samples of essays to detect common themes and concerns) confirms particular problems we need to address, none of which are surprises, but all of which look different when tallied together in a formal review. Since those essays touch on academic and residential questions, a review of them has pointed a clearer way toward examining relevant concerns that affect all students. We see students writing about the difficulty of transition, the size of the College, the challenges of registration, among other issues. As we consider developing various programs to address these, we can base these discussions and decisions on data, not just on anecdotal knowledge.

Academic Services

In response to feedback about uncertainties with respect to the Plan process and imbalances in the faculty advising system, clearer Plan guidelines (in the form of the "Expectations" document) have been developed to create a shared understanding of the process college-wide. As described in the retention and graduation section above, an expanded advising program for first-year students is being developed to provide support to the current faculty advising structure. This new structure will necessarily affect the peer mentor program by creating clusters of peer mentors to work with the staff advisors in a close way throughout the fall term. The topics typically covered by the peer mentors (registration, advising, time management, for example) will be covered as well by the advisors from an institutional perspective. We hope that students will feel supported by each in different ways.

Programs emerging from the new curricular initiative on advancing public action have great potential to strengthen the student academic experience overall, and particularly in the first year. The module and design lab courses provide ways to connect first-year students to library services, technology, and other resources, in addition to introducing them to teachers and disciplines they might not otherwise encounter. The module courses can address areas in which students may need foundation work—in writing or mathematical skills, for example, augmenting limited offerings. The design lab courses and the philosophy that drives them also provide a cohesive experience, strengthening the sense of community and shared purpose.

 Students have experienced the registration process as overwhelming, unclear, and unfair. Based on feedback from students via SEPC and peer mentors, the registration process has evolved to promote more efficiency, equity, and satisfaction with the process. The most significant change we made was to create a lottery system for all 2000-level classes to give everyone a fair chance. While this has indeed lessened the burden on the faculty and opened registration slots to more students, we have more work to do. We are working to resolve issues related to available seats in individual classes (classroom maximums), in disciplines (distribution of 2000 and 4000-level classes over the week and term), and the dilemma of how to handle classes required by Plan committees.

Our development of a disability accommodation process and designation of a staff member to handle these requests put a spotlight on disabled students. Through her experience in solving individual student issues and participating in the academic review at the end of each term, we came to see that disabled students often confronted challenges with writing, time management, and advocating for themselves. We work well with our College counsel to monitor application of the law as we interpret it for individual students; we have expanded our contact with faculty advisors to make sure they are fully aware of individual student needs, while allowing students to stay at the center of advocacy; we take extra care now in assigning faculty advisors to students with disabilities; we have taken on a greater role in helping these students register; and we have begun to work with an expert tutor in the local community to support these students as needed.

Student Affairs

The shift in the student life office reporting structure to the provost and dean has resulted in a more collaborative and holistic approach to working with students. Combined weekly staff meetings provide opportunities to discuss curricular and co-curricular initiatives. Additional staffing in the office of student life has allowed for a more robust and thoughtful array of services and programs. We continue to work to expand both services and programs for students.

Each term, house residents are invited to provide feedback on their living experience, the house community, and the work of their house chairs. These written assessments have assisted in strengthening the house chair position. Feedback provided has also helped to define training needs, refine job expectations, and determine resource allocation for community development activities. This process has positively affected the satisfaction, health, and safety of the residential experience, while anchoring the concept of student governance.

In the past ten years, the concerted expansion of leadership opportunities and the institutionalization of organizations and activities through the Program Activity Council have enhanced the student experience. More students are able to participate in shaping the campus community, resulting in more diversity in programs and activities.

In recent years, the pace of house renovations has been accelerated, in collaboration with students and the design team. The new Student Center and newly renovated spaces for student activity have moved the locus of activity from student residences, which has made socializing on campus more accessible and less exclusive. One ongoing challenge of physical recreation programs is facilities space. We are in the preliminary stages of developing a short- and long-term plan for expanding opportunities for sports and recreation focusing on the development of outdoor space and some indoor spaces.

Evaluations of the orientation experience have led to improvements, most notably the expansion of the pre-orientation trips (both in time and offerings), the breadth of the program, the addition of faculty-led workshops, and the successful integration of new students with continuing students. Evaluations of the upgraded orientation experience have been positive.

Working closely with the student governance bodies, Student Council and SEPC, has effectively supported their evolution. Student Council continues to struggle with purpose and place within the community. Given the self-directed nature of Bennington students and programs, students are apt to initiate individual or small group problem-solving and idea development rather than turning to Student Council to assist them. This conundrum continues to challenge the purpose of Student Council. In the past two years, SEPC has collaborated with the Curriculum Planning and Academic Policies Committees on issues of academic life and continues work to define its mission and role within the academic structure. During the 2008–09 academic year, the office of student life provided more direct advisory support to SEPC in an effort to strengthen its role.

Each spring, focus groups with students are conducted on a variety of topics. In response to issues raised last year about feelings of isolation and limited social interactions, we have several initiatives underway. We now offer a shuttle service in collaboration with a local transportation company. Students, faculty, and staff can reserve transportation to and from Albany four days a week. This option provides regular service to the bus and train stations and airport.

In response to feedback about food services, we are making plans to offer more flexibility in our meal plan beginning in fall 2010; time is required to implement the necessary infrastructure to support this change. Participation in a meal plan will still be required of residential students. This change will provide students with a choice in the number of meals and will also offer them guest meal passes, flex-dollars to spend in retail locations on campus, and dining hall evening hours will be extended.

We have enhanced our intramural program by working to coordinate more trip offerings to local places of interest and more events for the community. We hope to expand these offerings to provide greater exposure to the New England region and additional opportunities for off-campus experiences.

Changing the name of the security department to the office of campus safety reflects a corresponding emphasis on safety. The recent addition of a female officer is a positive step towards balancing the gender ratio in that office.

Given the current emphasis on sustainable environmental practices, students and staff work to develop initiatives that emphasize this work. The Sustainability Committee, chaired by the president of the College, invites members of the community to forward sustainability proposals for consideration. The work of this committee is beginning to have a positive effect in engaging the community in creating actionable proposals, a number of which have already been implemented.

The director of health services has been on staff for more than six years, as have several of his staff members. A dietician is now available weekly, a midwife provides gynecological counseling, a regular column in the student newspaper offers information from the physician about pressing health issues, and referral support for students with health issues is now available over FWT and summer. In addition, the appointment two years ago of a new director of psychological counseling (replacing a long-time director who retired) has maintained the strong counseling support services built over time.

Projection

Student Services
Academic Services
Ongoing faculty work on advanced work guidelines for the disciplines, in addition to the "Expectations" document, should result in clarifying the Plan process, allowing students to navigate and design their educational paths more effectively. Faculty-led discussions during the 2009–10 academic year will provide the forum for new students in particular to understand and integrate these "Expectations." Additionally, careful training and evaluation of the new first-year advisors will be crucial to the success of this endeavor.

The FWT/CD office will continue to assess and improve its services, particularly the weekly workshop offerings that support students through each step of the process. As we plan to implement our pilot project for new students over FWT, we are building in a specific assessment component to evaluate the effectiveness of this idea for students and the community.

We are committed to the continual development of support for students with disabilities. Since time management issues seem to affect students with learning disabilities, as well as students who tend to be drawn to Bennington in general, we will focus the attention of the new staff advisors on this issue from the beginning.

Given the dissatisfaction with general support services students have expressed in person and through essays and surveys, we need to press them for more specific information about problems. We plan to conduct focus groups in the fall 2009 that will use certain benchmark questions from the National Survey on Student Engagement on "supportive campus environment" to illuminate their concerns.

Regarding registration, we already know what many of the problems are; we are in the process of reviewing possible solutions with the faculty and administrative staff. We have followed up on the fall 2008 letter to the faculty from the provost and dean detailing some of the course maximum issues by discussing the topic with the Curriculum Planning Committee in spring 2009. Following the recent addition of a new CIO, we will also explore hitherto untapped ways of using technology to ease the registration process. Discussions between the CIO and the registrar, as well as other relevant staff, have just begun and will continue in earnest as we determine the appropriate ERP, portal, and other technological supports for the community.

Student Affairs
In 2009–10, we will conduct a review of student life services and programs to determine areas for development and proper resource allocation. More important, these data will guide our efforts to improve retention. Examples of this work include determining the viability for expanded sports programs beyond the intramural level; investigating the viability of a one-card system, contingent upon financial resources; and continuing to develop residential alternatives for students and recreational options.

Based on ongoing assessment, we will make decisions regarding resource allocation for programs and facilities. Some projected projects include the development and implementation of an environmental conservation program in the houses and the creation of a selection process for off-campus housing.

We will continue to expand leadership and community service opportunities to support emerging projects on and off campus. Work with Student Council and SEPC will be critical in providing structure for student governance beyond the residential experience. Expanded training and support will be provided to bolster the effectiveness of these organizations.

We will continue to encourage campus involvement in sustainability issues through support for developing proposals, workshops on green issues, and the development of a campus residence focused on environmental issues. In addition to the work of the Sustainability Committee, a student sustainability coordinator, working with the environmental studies coordinator, will provide support for this initiative.

In collaboration with academic services, we will expand our support of students with disabilities via clearer administrative processes; areas to consider include the development of an application for medical single, more clearly defined referral processes for support, and more training for staff.

Recreation and intramural programs will be offered more broadly and consistently throughout the year. An expansion of the intramural program will also provide more opportunities for students to participate in health and wellness development.

Given the momentum of the new initiative on advancing public action, the notion of how we incorporate the awareness of global citizenship will be a pressing issue in our work.

Institutional Effectiveness

Our collective work (admissions, retention, student affairs and academic services) in attending to students from the admissions process through graduation demands a shared understanding of the full potential of the student experience. Over the past five years, each of these areas—through national assessments, focus groups and in-depth study, and ongoing programmatic evaluations—has developed collaborative processes to guide the growth and development of programs and services. We now do this much more consistently and systematically than in years past. The ongoing challenge is to continue to refine and develop our offerings and work to incorporate technology into our systems in an accessible, intelligent, and consistent way.

STANDARD SEVEN: LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES

Description

Crossett Library supports the creative and individualistic educational tradition of Bennington College by providing outstanding library services that support the academic endeavors of the community. We encourage curiosity and inquiry, teaching and learning, and a broad interpretation of the library's role within a wider educational context. The six guiding actions of the library are: teaching the knowledge needed to create intentional inquiries; promoting opportunities to experience the joy of serendipitous discovery; building collections and services in collaboration with the community; creating environments for solitary contemplation and gregarious collaboration; facilitating the appreciation and celebration of books; and engaging technologies that enhance services and the collection.

The library's collection of information resources is not viewed as a static body but rather as an organic and vital extension of the educational experience. Supporting the curricular needs of students and faculty guides our principles of collection development and service. The library offers a variety of information resources and services relevant to the evolving curriculum. The foundation of our philosophy is to provide highly personalized service focused on the individual needs of faculty and students. The library offers a variety of instructional services, including individual consultations with librarians, library instruction sessions for a class, librarian visits to classes, library tours, online research guides, and more. The Library Committee has endorsed a "menu of services" to explain each offering; each service listed includes the name and contact information of a faculty member who has used the services and found it to be effective.

The Crossett Library and Jennings Music Library collections include approximately 100,000 volumes, 40,000 ebooks, access to 26,000 full-text periodicals, 25,000 slides, 4,000 videos, 15,000 print scores, 2,000 electronic scores, 2,000 CDs, and 4,500 digital sound recordings. The print collection is modest but selected carefully with input from the community. Ongoing projects update the print collection to make it as relevant as possible to the research needs of students and faculty. Increases in the print budget over the last five years have been significant, allowing us to develop the collection to a much greater extent than in the past. The addition of ebooks has been useful in increasing the currency, breadth, and depth of the collection, especially in the sciences and social sciences. Subscribing to full-text electronic journal packages, rather than the print equivalents, has enabled us to expand the collection, enhance access, reduce costs, and conserve space. A 2007 Mellon Foundation grant has allowed for the expansion of the digital collections. The library's photography collection, which includes the work of Ansel Adams, Brett and Edward Weston, Sally Mann, and Alfred Stieglitz, is used for exhibition, teaching, and individual viewing. The library has circulating museum passes to the Clark Art Museum and MassMoCA.

The College archive contains documents, films, and photographs relating to its founding and to faculty and students, governance, buildings and grounds, and modern dance. As part of a 2005 Getty Campus Heritage grant, the College hired a part-time project archivist and a consulting firm. The project archivist processed and described several collections related to the founding and construction of the College. The archival consulting firm Inlook Group, Inc., of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, analyzed the state and condition of Bennington's archives. Grant funding provided a short-term project archivist who made considerable progress on processing and describing the collections, as well as handling research requests.

The library has a full-time staff of eight. The library staff is creative, service-oriented, and technologically proficient. The staff is adequate to serve the library and information needs of the College community with its current enrollment. The staff positions are director of library and information services, reference services librarian, technology resources librarian, collection services librarian, acquisitions coordinator, public services coordinator, interlibrary loan coordinator, and the head of Jennings Music Library. The full-time staff is supplemented with an additional 3,200 hours of staffing per year by student employees. The library is open 102 hours per week and a librarian is available 63 hours per week. The Library Committee, which contains representatives from the student body, the faculty, and the staff, meets throughout the term. The committee has recently worked on space planning, endorsing library initiatives, and creating new programs.

The library was designed by architect Pietro Belluschi to reflect the Modernist movement while remaining compatible with the original campus; it set the course for all new architecture that has followed at Bennington. In 1963, the library won the AIA/ALA First Honor Award. The library was designed for a student FTE of 350 and is currently too small to meet the needs of the College fully. Architect selection for the expansion of Crossett Library began in 2005. Requests for qualifications were sent to 21 firms. Four finalists gave presentations at the Architect Selection Committee meeting in April 2006, after which the committee made its final selection: Allied Works Architecture of Portland, Oregon, and New York City. Allied Works presented a preliminary site study and design concepts to the board of trustees.

Appraisal

A comprehensive peer review of Bennington's library facilities was conducted in October 2004 by library directors from Bowdoin, Wellesley, and Williams Colleges. Subsequent strategies for expanding and investing in key areas of the library follow closely the recommendations put forth in that review. Since the last NEASC visit, the College has made significant investments in the library's physical infrastructure, collections, archives, electronic resources, and staffing.

The annual budget for information resources has increased in the past seven years; along with capital expenditures and some reallocations within the library budget, such as moving funds from print subscriptions to databases, significant improvement has been made in collection development. Funding for books has increased 68 percent, funding for databases has increased 407 percent, funding for library computer services has increased 187 percent. With faculty guidance, a systematic program of collection development has been established to update and improve the collection.

The number of online collections and databases has increased 950 percent in the past seven years. The great influx of new resources has required the library to reconsider the best ways to teach students how to use the library for research. In a 2007 library survey, 50 percent of students stated they had "attended a library session as part of a class or been assigned to meet with a reference librarian individually." Of the students that experienced the library through a class or individual meeting, 81 percent described the experience as very or somewhat helpful. In surveys distributed after sessions, the average rating in 2007 was 4.4 on a 1-5 scale. While this is encouraging, it is problematic that 50 percent of the students have never experienced the library through a class. All incoming students receive a very basic tour of the library during orientation or with peer mentor groups but only students who experience the library through a class or utilize a class research guide receive in-depth instruction. We are assessing our incoming students' skills and the impact of their Bennington library experience by participating in the HEDS Research Practice Survey in 2008-2009.

Previously, there was no academic first-year program that the library could collaborate with, but with the new design labs, we are developing a program of "intentional inquiry," focused on directly connecting library research to course content. The librarians are also expanding their presence in the classroom by attending and participating in presentations and critiques. A new Library Fellows program, funded by the Mellon Foundation, offers faculty members the chance to work on specific, class-based projects by providing a private room in the library and funding for materials, equipment, and visiting speakers. The first Library Mellon Fellows were a digital arts faculty and computing faculty member who taught the class, The Augmented Library: A Site-Specific Installation. The year-long class culminated in the creation of an installation called Bennington Bookmarks, which encouraged visitors to explore areas of the library they may have previously overlooked and to share their ideas about the books and films. The Bookmarks are translucent objects with glowing colored lights inside. These beacons, found attached to books and DVDs, contain messages left by members of the community. The messages can be accessed at one of the three Bookmark Stations, located on each floor of the library. The touch-enabled screen provides access to the entirety of messages left over time.

The library actively pursues additional ways of integrating services and resources into the life of the College; activities include faculty-suggested reading lists, displays related to campus programs or lectures, film screenings; participation in student events such as health fairs, student-generated displays, a book collecting contest for students, an annual senior thesis reception; and showcasing faculty work. The library willingly supports other areas of the College; examples include cataloging the books in the FWT and career center office to give the

collection more exposure, creating a wellness book collection in collaboration with health and psychological services, and using the library's system to catalog and circulate the video equipment in VAPA.

The 2006 implementation of a new integrated library system has improved access to the library's information resources. It allows for a number of new patron-initiated services, for example, holding and renewing items online. It streamlines the acquisitions and cataloging process, enabling more accurate collection analysis and development. Cataloging has improved because records can now be loaded directly from two sources. It has expanded the ability of patrons to access library databases with a remote login—a top priority for the library

because of the low-residency graduate programs, the extended period of time students are off campus during FWT, and the research needs of faculty members living off campus. The new system has also allowed the implementation of an electronic reserves system, which has been particularly useful in integrating the Jennings Music Library with Crossett Library and ensuring standardized copyright compliancy.

We have made additional information access enhancements over the past several years: Classification Web and Cataloger's Desktop have improved the workflow in collection services; Journal Finder allows patrons one-stop searching to locate every print and online full-text periodical owned by the library; interlibrary loan was automated through implementation of the ILLiad system; and specific gateways were added to the library website for faculty and students. The library has added browser customization options to assist patrons in locating scholarly resources more efficiently. An extension for Firefox and Internet Explorer allows faculty members and students to search the library's catalog or journal finder directly from the browser's toolbar, and plug-ins allow students and faculty members to search databases from their Firefox or Internet Explorer browser search box.

New technology resources include a smart classroom that has the capacity to project a laptop screen as well as audio and domestic/foreign format movies. Students are also welcome to reserve the smart room and make use of its equipment, enabling it to function as a collaborative learning space. In 2007, all computers at public workstations were replaced with new models. The establishment of an in-library circulating PC and Mac laptop program in 2006 offers students and faculty the ability to choose where they want to work in the library and provides much-needed computers for library teaching sessions.

Bennington's collection, while small, is carefully curated in collaboration with the community to maximize relevance and usage. Material circulation has increased 38 percent from 2003 to 2007. In FY 2008, a total of 39,909 items circulated, a 7.5 percent increase from FY 2007. The total circulation for books was 17,196— an average of 24 books checked out per student. Many avenues are used to solicit material purchase requests from faculty and students, including personal contacts, online and paper forms, emailed faculty prepublication alerts, meetings with discipline groups, faculty library material budgets, book-buying trips with faculty, library presence in social networking sites used by students, and meeting with student groups. The highest priorities for collection development expenditures are faculty and student requests.

Today, the 17,022 square-foot Crossett Library, built to hold 70,000 volumes for a campus of 400 students, is simply too small to accommodate the collections, services, patrons, and staff required to support a liberal arts curriculum of the breadth offered at Bennington. The expansion and renovation of the library is critical. In addition to the progress made with the expansion planning, significant investments to the library's building and environment have taken place in the past seven years:
- The HVAC system was replaced. The new, state-of-the-art system permits the regulation of humidity through the central air handling system. Additional temperature control zones in the library provide more consistent heating and cooling throughout the building.
- A diesel generator was installed to provide an emergency source of electricity in the event of a loss of regular electrical power, ensuring that the library can remain open and functional.
- New emergency lighting and exit signs were installed.
- A new College archive was constructed in VAPA. The design allows for better arrangement of the shelving units and more space between units than the old facility.
- Three new rooms were converted for public use: a reading room with comfortable seating, a meeting room with digital and video projection, and a special project-based classroom.

- Air conditioning was installed in Jennings Music Library for improved temperature and humidity control.
- Two new reading spaces and a new book area have been defined with comfortable chairs, couches, lights, and rugs.
- Building exterior was painted and new cork floor tiles were installed on the top floor.
- The furniture original to the building has been repaired, refinished, and/or reupholstered.

Mold growth in the library had been a significant concern; more than 7,000 volumes were removed due to mold between 2002 and 2007. The College hired Centerline Architects and Planners, an award-winning firm in Bennington, Vermont, and consulting engineers Altieri, Sebor, Wieber, LLC, to manage mold remediation. The new, state-of-the-art HVAC system, installed at the recommendation of this team, permits the regulation of

humidity through the central air handling system. Additional temperature control zones in the library provide more consistent heating and cooling throughout the building. Ongoing adjustments to the system establish the correct levels of humidity and temperature.

The library staff has built a service-oriented, welcoming environment. In a 2007 library survey, 95 percent of students responded "true" to the statement, "it is easy to ask the library staff for help." Funding for professional development through training and conference attendance has tripled since 2002. The lack of a full-time archivist continues to be problematic; the archives are rich with possibility, but without an archivist on staff, the materials cannot be fully utilized.

Projection

We will continue to teach students to use the library in meaningful ways by connecting the teaching to the curriculum, the content of their work, and the educational mission of the College. We will continue to offer the faculty a variety of opportunities and services to incorporate the library into their classes. Offerings will be developed with faculty input and each one will be flexible and adaptable to the specific needs of the faculty member. The library staff will meet each term to review the upcoming curriculum. In addition to the standard services offered to the faculty, the library staff will identify courses that might especially benefit from library services such as collection development, research guides, and instruction sessions. The library staff will contact faculty members and offer proposals customized to specific courses. To ensure library instruction is relevant to meeting the needs of faculty and students and that we spend our time and resources effectively, we will engage in open dialogues through a variety of means, including annual surveys, teaching session evaluations, and one-on-one discussions. We will evaluate feedback and implement changes in a timely manner.

We will continue to utilize emerging technologies, such as browser plug-ins, open-source coding, and social networking software, in ways that support and expand the library's teaching and communication goals. One example is a goal to create online tutorials for specific research topics by the end of 2010. The library staff will stay current with emerging trends by participating in workshops, attending conferences, and reading professional materials.

To maintain and improve our high level of service, the library staff will perform an annual service audit. We will evaluate suggestions received throughout the year to identify needs and brainstorm possible solutions. Signage throughout the library will be reviewed for accuracy, clarity, and tone. We will review the webpage for usability, accuracy, and currency. We will review processes and procedures related to the faculty with a particular focus on ensuring ease and efficiency, in order to provide excellent service and safeguard their time. We will review processes and procedures related to the student with a particular focus on maintaining consistency, flexibility, fairness, and sustainability, in order to offer a welcoming atmosphere and communal understanding of the privileges and responsibilities related to the library.

The library will increase the size of the collection consistent with the strategic plan of the College. In the strategic plan, the annual budget allocations for the library's print collection increase by 62 percent and electronic resources by 26 percent. While these fiscal increases are vital, the library also will be committed to controlling costs. We will evaluate spending carefully with input from faculty and students and continue to explore additional cost savings

through activities such as joining consortia, negotiating prices, utilizing open-source software, and applying for grants. An important short-term goal is to inventory the entire collection, which has not been done in more than 10 years, by the summer of 2010.

While we currently do not have a short-term implementation plan, we have a long-term goal of establishing a formal archives management program (following the recommendations outlined in the 2005 archives external review), hiring an experienced archivist, and making physical improvements to archive storage and work space.

We will nurture the creativity, resourcefulness, and strong service ethic of the library staff through a variety of means: offering professional development opportunities, seeking input into library planning, allowing flexibility in job roles, encouraging staff initiatives, acknowledging superior performance, and supporting independent decision-making.

As part of the College's strategic plan, we will reconfigure the existing space to maximize utility and appearance. We are committed to a long-term goal of a library addition, dependent on significant fundraising. The goal will be to recapture the library's initial elegance, equip it with the smartest and most current information technology systems, and make it the hub of intellectual life on campus. The envisioned library will:

- invite people inside to ask questions and find answers in energetic hubs or in quiet havens;
- offer sufficient room for the collection to grow;
- design spaces for maximum flexibility so that they may be transformed in response to usage needs;
- supply the most traditional and the most contemporary tools in a seamless continuum, creating an environment in which technology is pervasive yet transparent;
- draw together vital but currently dispersed elements, such as the College archives and the Jennings Music Library, into a unified space for learning and reflection;
- and resonate with transforming campus initiatives, serving as the embodiment of a Bennington education.

Institutional Effectiveness

The library staff understands and addresses the needs of the campus community with its commitment to open communication in a diverse range of venues. Through the ongoing evaluation of statistical and anecdotal information, the library implements changes and develops new ways to support students and faculty. A strong service ethic further informs the programmatic direction of the library and provides an overarching philosophy that serves as a foundation for existing services and a guide for new programs.

STANDARD EIGHT: PHYSICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Introduction

Bennington has advanced significantly in ensuring that our physical and technological resources support our educational mission. We have made substantial efforts to improve the facilities management operation and to integrate the funding and planning of our physical and technological resources. The College has invested $22,968,000 over the last ten years in capital improvements, deferred maintenance, safety issues, and code compliance, compared to $4,841,000 during the prior ten-year period. Technological improvements and equipment upgrades have resulted in an average of $204,000 in annual expenditures over the last five years. In addition, expenditures in the last decade for new buildings have totaled $17,697,000. In the period from 1975 through 1999, $118,000 was allocated to new construction. The board of trustees dedicated a substantial portion of the College's 75th anniversary capital campaign to campus renewal, accounting for this substantial increase in spending.

For clarity, Standard Eight is divided into two sections, Physical Resources and Technological Resources, each with its own description, appraisal, and projection.

Description

Physical Resources

The College's main campus occupies an area of 360 acres, with roughly half in the village of North Bennington and the other half in the town of Bennington. (A recent land survey corrected a long-held misconception that the main campus consisted of 550 acres.) An adjacent property was added to the campus in 2005 to protect the main entrance from encroaching commercial development. The College also owns 80 acres in Shaftsbury, the home of the president of the College, and another four acres in North Bennington for the only off-campus student residence, Welling Town House. There are 60 buildings on the main campus, comprising a total of 576,000 square feet, which includes four new structures constructed since 1999 (totaling 30,000 square feet). The ages of the buildings range from two to 235 years, with 33 percent constructed before 1936 (predating the founding of the College), 25 percent between 1933 and 1945 (built for the College), 13 percent between 1968 and 1975 (mid-century modern), and 12 percent built since 1975.

In 2006, the College received a grant from the Getty Foundation for Campus Historic Preservation, one of ten awarded that year. Its purpose was to document the physical campus, develop a preservation plan for the historic buildings, and prepare for application of the campus as an historic district to the National Historic Register. The grant was successfully completed in 2008 and the comprehensive report is on reserve in Crossett Library.

Capital Additions

From 1999 to 2008, the College spent approximately $17,697,000 on new construction. Funded through a combination of gifts, annual budget funds, and borrowing, new buildings constructed in recent years include:

- *New student houses.* As anticipated in 1999, three new houses—Perkins, Merck, and Paris-Borden, adding 105 beds to campus capacity—were completed and in use by fall 2001. Designed by Kyu Sung Woo, these award-winning buildings meet the needs of the community and have been successfully integrated into the residential life of the campus community.

- *Student Center.* Completed in 2006, the addition of 7,500 square feet of dedicated student recreational space has transformed student life programming.

- *Biomass project* (see section on energy conservation, below).The central heating plant, serving 85 percent of the campus, was converted in spring 2008 from an oil-based to a predominately wood-chip system, creating significant, long-term financial and environmental benefits to the College.

Capital Improvements and Deferred Maintenance

Major enhancements to buildings include:

- *Dickinson Science Building.* In 2007, the architectural firm Einhorn Yaffe Prescott undertook a comprehensive systems and structural analysis and created a plan for space reallocation and laboratory upgrades.

- *Tishman Hall.* The College's local architectural firm, Centerline Architects, designed and directed improved lighting and technological installations to provide for programming flexibility and multi-media presentations.

- *Visual and Performing Arts Center.* Much work has been done in this vast complex to maintain and improve teaching, performing, and studio spaces. The College engaged Centerline Architects to design and oversee safety upgrades to all windows and openings; install code-compliant railings throughout (to be completed in 2010); install catwalks to replace outdated safety netting in two theaters; perform systems, energy conservation, and structural analyses; install a new lighting system in Usdan Gallery; and undertake the first phase of systems upgrades (to be completed in 2009).

- *Deane Carriage Barn.* Funded by a gift from a trustee, these comprehensive renovations were completed in 2007. They include ADA compliance upgrades, safety systems installation, energy conservation measures, air conditioning, and aesthetic and practical improvements.

- *The Barn.* Recent improvements include the complete renovation of the bookstore, ADA/code improvements, the addition of two mediated classrooms, ongoing upgrades of offices and office furniture, and air-conditioning of year-round offices.

- *Cricket Hill.* Funded by a trustee, the conversion from an outdated faculty dwelling to the new home of admissions occurred in 2003.

- *Crossett Library.* A systems analysis by Sebor/Altieri/Weber preceded implementation of an improved HVAC system to remediate insufficient temperature controls and mold problems. In 2006, the schematic design for a long-term plan for library expansion, led by Allied Works Architects of New York, was completed. Ongoing safety measures include the replacement of interior and exterior railing systems.

- *The Café.* With the addition of the Student Center, the Café, both upstairs and downstairs, underwent remodeling and refurbishment in 2007.

- *Student houses.* Since 1999, a plan for the renovation of all bathrooms and kitchens in each house was instituted, a departure from the piecemeal approach in the past. Eight houses have been completed. In addition, the kitchen of Welling Town House, the only cooperative student living facility, was completely redesigned and rebuilt in 2006.

- *Landscaping.* In accordance with the 2004 campus landscape master plan, many trees, shrubs, pathways, and roadways have been added or replaced. The new signage system, designed by Roll Barresi Associates in collaboration with a group of faculty and staff, was installed in 2006.

- *Dining halls.* In response to students' concerns regarding congestion at lunch time, a plan for a phased renovation of the dining halls was accelerated in early 2009.

Staffing and Management

Responsibility for providing planning and management of Bennington's physical resources rests with the office of facilities management, under the auspices of the executive vice president for finance and administration, and with the vice president for planning and special programs. Each operates independently but in close coordination to accomplish planning, design, construction, maintenance, service, and operation of the College's facilities and infrastructure.

The office of facilities management is composed of a director, an assistant director, an administrative assistant, a purchasing agent, and a stockroom clerk. Directly reporting to the assistant director are the housekeeping supervisor and 12 crafts persons of various trades. Twenty housekeepers and two housekeeper/movers report to the housekeeping supervisor. To assess staffing levels, the management team reviews comparative data from peer institutions participating in the Sightlines Return on Physical Assets (ROPA) benchmarking program. We also take into account the amount of work to be accomplished in-house through the capital budgeting and deferred maintenance program. As the College's enrollment has grown and buildings have been added, the number of staff has increased. Since 1999, three housekeepers, an electrician, a boiler operator, a groundskeeper, and a groundskeeper/painter have been added to the facilities management staff. The focus of the in-house trade staff is on repairs and maintenance. Intensive renovation projects are outsourced to local contractors.

Energy Conservation

Bennington has made a strong commitment to resource conservation by incorporating sustainable design and practices into our maintenance operation and all of our construction, renovation, and retrofit work. Water conservation is improved through the installation of 30 variable-flow toilets and low-flow showers and fixtures. Lighting and electrical appliances are selected based on their energy efficiency. Green construction materials and techniques are implemented whenever practical. Low-impact chemicals are being used on a trial basis in six of the buildings, and a multi-product recycling program is in place on campus. After a thorough engineering analysis, our new Center for the Advancement of Public Action building will incorporate high-performance glazing and thermal insulation and a cutting-edge geothermal heating and cooling system with energy recapture.

In 2005, we engaged engineering consultants Sebesta Blomberg to evaluate campus energy use and present recommendations to reduce consumption. Twenty-two energy conservation measures were implemented at a cost of $891,000, with approximately 20 percent reduction in BTU demand. The most ambitious energy conservation measure was the conversion of the College's central heating plant to a wood-chip based system in April 2008. By using a sustainable resource for a majority of our heating and domestic hot water needs, we can reduce our dependence upon oil; specifically, we project to decrease fuel expenses in 2008–09 by $310,000.

Safety

- *Training.* The office of human resources provides safety training to all new employees. Additional job-specific safety training is delivered to staff based on their specific responsibilities. Safety training sessions are held each year for maintenance, housekeeping, dining halls, health services, and safety personnel. Topics include fire safety, hazardous materials, blood-borne pathogens, driver safety, proper serving of food and alcohol, first aid and CPR, working in confined spaces, ladder safety, safe forklift operation, slip and fall prevention, and lockout/tagout. The College's safety training program is aimed at minimizing accidents and injuries.

- *Emergency plan and guidelines.* In 2005, directors of key offices created a catastrophic emergency response plan, adapted from an existing emergency plan, which provides detailed information for systematic, comprehensive responses to possible campus or local emergencies ranging from human needs during a crisis to the physical, structural, or technical repairs needed to restore College facilities to operational status. It is reviewed on a quarterly basis. In addition, the dean of students, the vice president for planning and special programs, the directors of health services and psychological counseling, and the director of safety meet several times a year to review and update internal emergency guidelines, a blueprint for managing student emergencies. An emergency notification system using telephone and email contacts was implemented in 2008.

- *Safety Committee.* The Safety Committee, reconstituted in 2005 and chaired by the assistant director of facilities management, is made up of the director of human resources, the vice president for planning and special programs, the associate dean for academic affairs, the dean of students, the director of facilities management, the executive vice president for finance and administration, a science faculty member, and a student. In meetings held four times a year, topics include new, completed, and ongoing safety items; employee safety training; waste stream management; and classroom and student safety.

- *Fire safety.* The College has upgraded the fire alarm and sprinkler systems throughout much of the campus. All student residences now have full sprinkler systems and all major buildings are monitored by a

central fire alarm station located in the campus safety booth. Other buildings have independent fire alarm systems. Smoking, prohibited in all campus academic and recreational buildings, is permitted in the student rooms of 16 of the 20 student residences.

- *ADA compliance.* All academic buildings and the three newest student houses are ADA compliant, as are the new Student Center, the recently renovated Carriage Barn, and Fels and Sawtell houses. A handicap-access bathroom was added to the Barn in early 2009. During the annual new project review process, ADA compliance is given strong consideration.

- *Code compliance/environmental safety.* Several building code compliance inspections are conducted on established schedules: elevator, fire alarm systems, sprinkler systems, fire extinguishers, boilers/compressors, and smoke/carbon monoxide alarms. Smoke/carbon monoxide alarms are inspected internally by the College's trained staff. Fully licensed contractors conduct all other inspections. Any and all non-conformances are brought to the attention of the director of facilities management so that corrective action can be implemented in a timely manner. The College continues to remain in full compliance with EPA regulations. The assistant director of facilities management administers waste stream management. Asbestos removal continues on an ongoing basis and is conducted by a fully licensed environmental contractor using prescribed methods and techniques. Eighteen underground oil storage tanks have been removed in the past five years, with the last five scheduled for removal over the next year.

- *Other safety measures.* Five solar-powered emergency telephones and 50 overhead walkway lights have been installed since 1999 as part of an annual program to improve safety in outlying areas of the campus. A continuing program to replace older railings in stairways and balconies has been in place since 2005; 1,250 linear feet of railings have been installed to date.

Planning

Annually, the president, the provost and dean, the executive vice president, and the vice president for planning and special programs determine the priorities for capital expenditures and the deferred maintenance budget. Annual reviews of housing needs determine priorities, and *ad hoc* meetings are called for immediate concerns. For example, in 2007 when space issues arose in the Visual and Performing Arts building, the art faculty, along with staff and the local architect, developed a space allocation plan, which will be updated and implemented as funds become available. Feasibility studies for particular buildings and projects (VAPA systems, Dickinson assessment, energy conservation, Commons) are conducted regularly to determine next steps and priorities.

Long-term planning is led by the vice president for planning and special programs in consultation with the facilities management team. The "black book," a comprehensive list of the College's physical needs, both short- and long-term, is updated throughout the year. The book includes all capital needs, large and small, as well as the outstanding list of all deferred maintenance projects. In addition, a grant from the Getty Foundation provided for the development of a long-term campus preservation plan for 88 percent of the College's buildings.

The College engages faculty, staff, and students in collaborative processes regarding facilities planning through open meetings, community bulletins, and focused group discussions regarding facilities needs or upcoming projects. The strategic planning process will also serve as a guide for future facilities and capital expenditure decision-making by identifying facilities priorities.

Appraisal

Physical Resources

Over the last 10 years, four essential changes have contributed to the transformation of the campus: effective planning, increased funding for capital needs, improved facilities operation and management, and intensive collaboration among key offices.

The creation of the vice president for planning and special programs position has allowed the College to improve the condition of facilities, to incorporate sustainable and energy-conserving practices, to address more aggressively our deferred maintenance backlog, and to improve residential and academic facilities in a comprehensive and

systematic way. In addition, the new positions of assistant director of facilities management, project manager, and College design coordinator have added to the efficiency and quality of operations. Monthly campus tours by facilities management leadership have improved the look of the campus. Since 2007, an annual assessment by Sightlines, a facilities consulting group, has contributed greatly to our understanding of staffing needs, service capabilities, funding priorities, and how we compare to peer institutions' facilities programs. Other assessment tools include student reflection essays, the NSSE surveys, and staff /faculty responses to the Sightlines survey.

Although we have achieved considerable headway in reducing deferred maintenance over the last five years, more work remains. The Sightlines study shows that because of the deferred maintenance backlog, capital expenditures would have to increase to make up for the years in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the College lacked the financial resources to address these issues. The College's operating budgets in recent years compare favorably to peer institutions according to the Sightlines report, as do our service and grounds appearance scores. The outstanding "to do" list has been reduced from $30 million in 2005 to $16 million in 2008. Several studies have been accomplished by outside consultants to assess the extent of the work needed to upgrade particular buildings, but substantial funding is needed for complete retrofitting and renovation. Because most campus buildings were built before 1976 and are showing their age, renovations are a costly endeavor, limiting the number of projects that can be undertaken each year. Inflation and escalation of construction and renovation costs add to the challenge. Several major buildings are in need of upgrading: Jennings, Dickinson, Commons, and VAPA; phased upgrades continue out of capital budgets, but comprehensive renovations are contingent upon additional funding. Keeping the facilities/capital expenditure budget in balance with other institutional needs and initiatives is an annual challenge.

The schedule for the cyclical renovation of student houses, optimally at two to three houses per year, is slower than planned, due to competing budget priorities. Classroom improvements, which include technological upgrades and replacement of outdated furniture, continue on an annual basis, but the pace needs to be accelerated. The need for larger academic spaces, to accommodate classrooms of 30 to 50 students, is addressed in the strategic plan. A five-year capital plan is needed, guided by the strategic plan.

The results of the Sightlines study indicate that the College has better than adequate staffing and operational budgets to maintain the campus, as compared to peer institutions. The 2007 study noted the need for an improved communication process between College facility staff and facility users, which the College has begun to address through an online work order process. Uniforms for the staff have created an atmosphere of professionalism and added to safety by having staff easily identifiable in student houses. A collaborative project in 2008 was the renovation of a faculty residence, in which the entire staff of facilities management worked together for a week, providing much-needed team building. The focus of the in-house trade staff is on repairs and maintenance. Intensive renovation projects will continue to be outsourced to local contractors through competitive bidding practices. We have made considerable progress in the area of preventative maintenance as a result of the Sightlines study and the addition of the assistant director of facilities management.

The College puts a strong emphasis on our comprehensive safety training program in conjunction with our insurance carrier; evidence of its effectiveness is represented by Bennington's NCCI (National Council on Compensation Insurance) rating, which has dropped from a high of 1.30 in 2003 to .87 in 2008.

Much has been accomplished in campus landscaping improvements, all under the guidelines set forth in the 2004 master plan. These include extensive brush clearing around the pond and along roads; a new parking lot; a new half-mile pathway along the entrance to the College; and new paths, trees, and lighting for the entrance to VAPA.

Projection

Physical Resources

The external relations office and the president are committed to securing additional funding for campus renewal and will continue to seek new capital for the "campus renewal challenge." Established by a trustee in 2007, its goal is to raise funds by matching donors with targeted campus needs. Additional funding for campus renewal will be included in the new building bond issue as well. The College's obligation to students, faculty, and staff in

providing a safe environment for teaching and learning will continue. To this end, the College will commit 20 percent of its deferred maintenance/capital expenditure budget each year towards code compliance and safety upgrades. The College will maintain our work with Sightlines to assess progress and set goals for the facilities management operation. The annual "black book" team will regularly evaluate the condition of the physical plant and its safety and regulatory compliance, as well as identify capital and deferred maintenance needs. In establishing the strategic plan, the senior administration will set academic, residential, and recreational priorities. The campus master plan, informed by the strategic plan, will be updated and provide realistic and achievable goals.

A comprehensive space-needs assessment in conjunction with strategic planning will be performed to determine immediate and long-term needs. Residential, recreational, and social spaces will continue to be assessed to ensure adequate space allocation. The plan for providing the quantity, appropriate sizes, and configurations of classrooms will be completed; a phased implementation is slated to begin in 2009.

In the area of sustainable practices, the College will begin construction on a new building in 2009 with the most environmentally friendly design on campus to date. The Center for the Advancement of Public Action will house the new curricular initiative. Heated geothermally, it will also have many other sustainable features. Energy conservation will remain a high priority in the College's future renovations and upgrades, with 30 additional energy-conserving fixtures installed in student houses in 2009 and more planned. The goal of converting half of the College's cleaning chemicals to green products will be achieved in 2010. ADA accessibility will be expanded to include portions of the Barn, Jennings Hall, and Booth and Sawtell houses by 2009. We will consider a plan for installing solar panels to the roof of VAPA.

The College is moving to further reduce smoking on campus. It will be prohibited in students' rooms, a goal expected to be fully implemented by the end of 2013–14 school year. Student house renovations will be back on schedule after 2009 and, with increased funding, the goal of two renovations per year is planned. Feasibility studies for major buildings outline a phased plan for remediation; a schedule for the phases will be developed in the next two years. Safety practices will be monitored by the Safety Committee and the office of campus safety. Team-building projects will be scheduled annually, if available, for the facilities management staff.

The decision to proceed with the national historic register application for the campus as an historic district will be made in the coming years, weighing the benefits and disadvantages to such a designation. The College will continue to maintain the historic essence of the campus by following the guidelines set out in the Plan for Historic Preservation, developed through a Getty Foundation grant, for future renovations and alterations to campus structures.

Description

Information Technology

The Bennington information technology (IT) office provides computing services that meet the numerous academic and administrative needs of the College. Faculty use IT services to prepare and deliver course materials and also in their scholarly research activities. Students are encouraged to use computers to enhance academic work in ways that exceed traditional word processing, computation, and information retrieval. Staff members use computing tools in their daily work to collaborate, obtain and organize information, analyze data, and generally conduct the business of the College.

The IT office is responsible for providing computing and telecommunications services and support to the entire College community. Following a planned reorganization in spring 2009, the office staff numbers nine: a vice president and chief information officer, a director, an applications specialist, three user support staff, an instructional technology manager, an audio-visual coordinator, and a telecommunication systems administrator.

The IT office maintains the infrastructure that supports myriad technological activities: the College website, email, databases, public computer labs, discipline-specific labs, "mediated" classrooms, and telecommunications. It supports various academic and administrative computer applications, including stand-alone systems that are not part of the College Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.

The physical networking infrastructure for data of the College is implemented as a hub-and-spoke interconnection of campus buildings using fiber optic trunks. Using the HP Procurve product line, 88 switches and 205 wireless radios are deployed on campus. The wireless network covers 100 percent of academic, administrative, and residential buildings (student and faculty). Using three vendors for redundancy, the campus has aggregate Internet access of 45 megabits per second. Enterprise-class monitoring tools produce immediate alerts to any problems in the network as well as historical data for trend analysis. Firewall and packet-shaping appliances protect the network from malicious or inappropriate use.

The data center houses 32 physical servers presently. Through the use of virtualization, eight of these servers host 40 virtual servers, providing more flexibility for administration and other advantages. In 2006, the College installed an ISCSI storage area network (SAN) with 3.5TB capacity. Currently, 2TB of this space is in use. Physical servers and storage are split between two campus buildings (Dickinson and Commons) for redundancy and business continuity for selected services such as DNS, Domain Controllers, and backup. Generators in critical locations for the network and systems infrastructure provide uninterruptible power sources during commercial power interruptions.

The College provides laptop computers to faculty, a three-year project completed in 2007 that distributed 95 Apple (68) and Windows (27) laptops. Administrators have been issued a total of 173 computers with the vast majority being Windows PCs. These are reviewed annually and refreshed on a four- or five-year cycle. Staff can access one of 22 black-and-white or five color printers for output.

Students and other members of the College community have access to the computer center (located in Dickinson Science Building), a facility equipped with 10 Macs, 12 Windows PCs, scanners, and black-and-white and color printers. Crossett Library houses nine Macs and seven Windows PCs, a networked laser printer, and an oversized color scanner. Patrons may check out one of eight Mac or nine Windows laptops for use in the library. The Commons building houses four Mac workstations for public use. Computers are loaded with the latest Adobe and Microsoft software, as well as a variety of specialized software to support the College's curriculum. The Center is open for use 108 hours per week (80 hours Monday through Friday and 28 hours on the weekend).

A number of more specialized computing clusters are housed on the campus. The digital arts lab, known as the Pod, has 13 Apple desktop stations, Mac Pros and iMacs, a flatbed scanner and a networked 11x17 black-and-white laser printer. It also features a dedicated print room, which makes use of an Epson wide-format color inkjet printer (24" capacity). Photography has its own digital print lab with six new iMacs, three Epson color portrait inkjet printers, a large-format flatbed scanner and two slide scanners. Multimedia courses use a digital lab/studio environment setup for different styles of animation, including slow-motion, puppetry, and 3D computer graphics. It is also Mac-based, featuring six Mac Pro towers, a number of which are also configured for Final Cut Pro video editing. The video lab has 12 Mac Pro Final Cut Pro stations with dedicated DV capture decks. Students can also sign out DV video cameras and lighting equipment. Theater lighting students have four PC workstations set up in their common studio area with the CAD application Vectorworks for design work. Architecture has a number of PC CAD stations as well. Electronic music and sound recording classes make use of a small collection of Mac Pro's, using ProTools in various custom configurations.

IT operates a help desk program and computer repair facility available to all members of the College community. Sixteen student monitors and technicians supplement three professional staff in providing support during the hours the computer center is open. The College offers ongoing training programs in Word, Excel, Access, and Outlook using outside vendors. Apple-certified service and PC repairs are performed on College-owned equipment at no charge. Student computers are repaired for a nominal charge.

In 2004 the College installed a Microsoft Exchange server to provide email services to faculty, students, and staff. Mail volume averages 88,000 incoming messages and 14,000 outgoing messages per week with nearly 80 percent of the incoming email being spam. A Vircom modusGate spam filter and quarantine provides effective management of this type of message and Sophos anti-virus software prevents infection of faculty and staff computers.

The College uses the Jenzabar QX ERP suite of applications. This system provides administrative functions for the admissions office, the dean's office, and the business office. Other supporting systems have been developed in-

house to extend the capability of the Jenzabar software (e.g., a letter processing system for admissions and suites of tools for faculty and students). Portal-like web pages enable students and faculty to view selected ERP data with easy-to-use interfaces.

An instructional technology manager was hired in 2006 and works with faculty to encourage the integration and adoption of new technologies into the College curriculum. In fall 2007, the College adopted Moodle, an open-source learning management system, as its main online course environment. Usage has grown steadily and 66 courses with enrollments totaling 450 students took advantage of the service during the 2008–09 academic year. The low-residency Master of Arts in Teaching a Second Language program also uses the application extensively.

A digital projects office (DPO) was established in spring 2007 to serve the multimedia needs of the faculty. The DPO prepares digital curriculum materials, including image files, audio and video clips, and scanning. The DPO also provides web design services to faculty. Typically, five students staff the office and assist a dozen or more instructors each term.

Most (59 percent) traditional classrooms on the campus have installed audio-visual equipment to permit use of audio, video, and computer images with projection. Other teaching spaces (labs, studios, galleries) are largely not technologically enabled; however, portable equipment can be placed in such rooms to meet specific needs.

The College converted our main website to a commercial content management system (CMS) in 2005 and has recently migrated to an open source CMS called FarCry based on Adobe's Coldfusion, which is the web application platform used by IT for development. Having the CMS and in-house applications on the same technology platform has enabled further integration of these applications. A contractor provides technical support for the web site as needed.

Appraisal

Information Technology

Actions taken by the College in response to formal assessment and user feedback over the past five years have created a computing infrastructure for networking and core services such as email and web publishing that is meeting the current needs. Growth in demand for existing services as well as interest in new capabilities presents challenges for the IT department to keep up with requirements and to secure funding. In recognition of the increasing importance and complexity of technology, the College has been working closely with the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITLE), a nonprofit organization that provides services to independent institutions of higher education in the area of digital technologies. A NITLE staff member, after visiting the campus and conducting in-depth interviews with administrators and IT staff, prepared a report in April 2008 that made a number of specific recommendations. The College has since taken steps to respond to its findings. The NITLE study continued the practice of periodically engaging external reviews of College IT, as was done in 2002 and 2003.

The report confirmed our decision to create a position of chief information officer (CIO). This position will provide a new level of leadership for an activity that is increasingly critical to the College's future success. The College will look to the CIO to develop and maintain a comprehensive, strategic IT plan, aligning operational IT objectives with the mission, strategic plan, and goals of the institution. We deem it especially critical that the CIO give proper attention to the academic needs of the institution. For this reason, among others, the CIO reports to the provost and dean. After a successful national search, the new CIO was appointed and joined the College in April 2009.

An updated and improved computing network on campus was another need the NITLE report identified. During the 2008–09 academic year, core network switching hardware was refreshed, Internet bandwidth was increased, and wireless networking was extended to all campus buildings. These improvements were well received by the community and overall use of the network has increased dramatically. That has prompted further internal studies to identify a bottleneck. A request for some additional network hardware is part of the IT capital proposal for FY2010. Another part of the NITLE recommendation to expand support for network issues through use of outside services will be explored in the future.

The next project identified by NITLE is the replacement of the current ERP system used by administrative offices such as admissions, the dean's office, registrar, and the business office. As it seems likely that the existing Jenzabar QX product will not remain supported for too many more years (given the decreasing number of institutions using this software), the College needs to identify its successor promptly. To this end, we have begun to investigate potential ERP solutions and have initiated business process mapping, starting with the business office. Following installation of a new ERP system, the College will consider development of an easy-to-use portal to tailor information access to the various constituent groups.

NITLE also pointed out the need to improve communications with users and specifically recommended the acquisition and deployment of a problem tracking system that would make it easier for users to report a problem and track its status. In fall 2008, Numara's Track-It software was purchased and installed for testing. A project is currently underway that aims to launch this new capability in fall 2009.

Finally, the NITLE report urged the College to explore opportunities to outsource some services or seek partners among other small institutions to get better economies of scale. As the technological capability of the campus increases and as faculty, students, and staff acquire additional skills to apply technology to their work, cost-effective solutions for support must be found.

The new CIO spent the first weeks of his job meeting with senior administrators, students, and faculty to learn more about their needs and aspirations for using technology. In addition to the items recommended by NITLE in their report, these discussions have also identified work to be done to manage software licensing for academic purposes, improve remote access to College electronic resources and services, expand technological support in classrooms, and clarify policies regarding acceptable use and information security and privacy.

Projection

Information Technology

The College has identified a number of important goals in the IT area that it intends to meet in the near future. These are described in the previous section. When fully implemented, the College will have new, experienced IT leadership with a seat at the senior staff table, a stronger and more capable infrastructure on which to build applications and services, a new administrative ERP environment meeting needs to manage and share data, and improved user communication. A two- or three-year period is contemplated to accomplish these ambitious but necessary goals.

There will, of course, always be other IT matters that need attention. The CIO, working with the instructional technology manager and IT staff, will need to ensure that faculty members are continually supported in their use of technology in instruction and research. More mediated classrooms need to be created (three a year, with a goal of 15 additional by 2014) and the equipment in them will need to be upgraded as new technology develops. Technology investigations and experimentation will have to happen in conjunction with curricular developments unique to the College (e.g., the Center for the Advancement of Public Action).

The small scale of the College argues for exploitation of collaboration and sharing with off-campus partners of all kinds. Joint ventures with other schools to harmonize methods and share in costs may prove effective, for example, in providing end-user support. As previously noted, NITLE has recommended use of more outside services for network and application support, which should be investigated. Other opportunities exist for "services in the cloud" (e.g., Google Apps and Microsoft Exchange Labs) that may be more cost effective than their in-house equivalents.

The College has identified improved technology capacity as a critical factor for our future success. The combination of new leadership supported by adequate resources will result in measurable improvement in this important endeavor.

Institutional Effectiveness

Bennington has made remarkable progress over the last several years and is poised to enter the next phase of our history with a greater understanding of the efforts required to manage our physical and technological assets. Through careful evaluation, we are effectively addressing aging facilities and our technological infrastructure. We have positioned ourselves by gathering the information needed to make intelligent decisions with the accumulated expertise of internal planning groups, facilities management and IT staff, and studies by outside consultants. Investment priorities will be guided by the strategic plan and conveyed to members of the College community as they evolve and are implemented. Faculty, students, and staff recognize the importance of an attractive and well-functioning campus and can supply the momentum necessary to perpetuate the evolution of facilities and technology at Bennington.

STANDARD NINE: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Introduction

Since NEASC's last full accreditation visit in November 1999, the financial position of Bennington College has improved dramatically. The College's net assets at the end of FY 2008 were $63.8 million, compared with $7.9 million at the end of FY 1998. Full-time undergraduate enrollment in fall 2008 was 613. Fall 1998 enrollment was 400. During the ten-year period ending June 30, 2008, private giving, exclusive of unpaid pledges, totaled $82 million—averaging a little more than $8 million annually. While the current economic climate will make sustaining these trajectories somewhat more uncertain, the evidence so far is encouraging. We are projecting a fall 2009 enrollment of 650 and believe we will exceed $8 million in fundraising for FY 2008–09. And while Bennington's endowment has suffered the same kinds of losses as has every other institution of higher learning, we have never had the luxury of counting on revenue from investments as a significant element in our operating budget, so its decline has had limited impact.

We are now in the early stages of a planned growth strategy aiming at an enrollment of 750. Our plans for achieving that goal include carefully developed recruitment and retention strategies. Seven-hundred-fifty students constitute a level of enrollment that can be sustained without major additional capital expenditures or significant increases in permanent faculty or staff. The purpose of this growth plan is to diminish the shortfall between tuition revenue and expenditures, thereby decreasing the pressure on annual fundraising.

In response to the current economic pressures on financial aid, fundraising, and investment revenue, the board of trustees, at its June 2009 meeting, mandated a salary freeze for FY 2010 on all full-time employees earning more than $35,000 a year. These savings, combined with serious budget restraint elsewhere, have limited the increase in expenditures for the coming fiscal year to one percent.

Description

With the close of the books for FY 2008, Bennington recorded its tenth consecutive year of positive financial results. (Given investment performance this year, FY 2009 will probably not allow us to report an eleventh consecutive year of increase in net assets.) One of the key factors in the attainment of these results was the continued growth in full-time undergraduate enrollment. In the fall 2007 cycle, applications from first-time students totaled 1,010, a significant increase over the previous high of 842 achieved in the fall 2004 cycle. That number has increased to 1,058 for the fall 2009 cycle. Fall 2007 first-time student enrollment at 201 tied the previous high (in fall 2004) and fall 2008 enrollment at 189 was the third highest in recent memory.

This increase in student enrollment has been accomplished without any decline in several indicators of academic quality. Among students enrolling in fall 2008, 31 percent were in the top tenth of their high school graduating class and 80 percent were in the top quarter of their class. These are the best numbers the College has seen in the last six years. This was also true of SAT scores (620-720 reading and 560-660 math) for fall 2008 first-time students. The numbers for students entering in fall 2007 were just slightly below those of fall 2008. SAT scores of admitted students in 2009 are 610-720 reading and 560-650 math.

The greatest pressure on tuition income is the skyrocketing cost of financial aid and we suspect that pressure is likely to increase, at least in the short term. The discount rate increased to 36.34 percent this year. We did succeed in lowering the rate for first-time students to 32.4 percent last year, which will help overall, but we anticipate that the rate will remain in the mid- to high-30s for the duration of the economic contraction.

Bennington has recently moderated its annual increase in tuition and other enrollment charges and we are not counting on being able to maintain tuition increases above 4 percent. Three years of 8 percent increases from FY 2004 to FY 2006 (making up for several years of very small increases in the 1990s) were followed by increases of 5 percent (FY 2007), 5 percent (FY 2008) and 6 percent (FY 2009). In January 2009 the board of trustees approved a 3.9 percent increase in charges for 2009–10.

Fundraising is the second key factor in Bennington's recent success. The College has received multiple seven- and eight-figure gifts—the largest in our history over the past seven years. In 2002 an alumna and her husband made an unrestricted gift of $5 million, at that time the largest gift in the College's history. They followed that gift with an additional $10 million donation in 2004. Both of these gifts were intended to support the ongoing work of the College with a special interest in new curricular initiatives.

Another alumna, whose particular interest has been the improvement of campus buildings and facilities, has made several gifts totaling just over $10 million over the last seven years. In 2006 a private foundation established by an alumna made a five-year pledge of $6.25 million in support of the academic program, with a focus on the new initiative in public action. The most recent major gift, also from a foundation headed by an alumna and her husband, is an unrestricted gift of $20 million, also in support of the new curricular initiative. Bennington received the first $2 million installment in December 2008.

These very substantial leadership gifts are the major, but not the only, good news on the development front. The number of Associates (donors who contribute $1,000 or more annually) has gone from 217 in FY 1998 to 239 in FY 2008. Annual fund totals for the same two periods were $1.251 million in FY 1998 and $1.465 million in FY 2008.

The comparison in annual giving totals from 1998 to 2008 does not tell the whole story of the stabilization and growth of the development program overall in that same time period. The College has carefully and steadily staffed its office, under the same leadership for the past five-plus years, to be better positioned to maximize private giving to the College. Bennington's external relations office is now structured with three full-time and one half-time gift officers who cultivate and solicit between 125 and 150 leadership donors annually; a corps of annual $1,000 donors from the '80s, '90s, '00s is being built; a planned giving program is now staffed and in place; and last year brought the conclusion of the College's largest fundraising effort, which raised more than $92 million toward a $75 million goal. This work is now conducted under the leadership of the philanthropy task force, a committee of the board of trustees.

These two revenue streams have enabled the College to show positive results over each of the last ten years. They have also allowed for improvements in a number of areas of College life. Bennington has increased faculty salaries by an average of 5.4 percent over the last six years making us increasingly competitive with comparable institutions. There is a dramatic improvement in campus facilities: the Deane Carriage Barn and other academic spaces have been renovated as well as several student and faculty residences, a new student center was built, an integrated library system has been installed, painting and repairs are attended to on a more frequent basis, and, with increased staffing, campus grounds are better maintained. We have just expanded wireless access in all campus buildings and well-traveled outside areas. Management staffing has improved with the hiring of the College's first chief information officer, the recently created position of assistant director of facilities management, and an associate provost whose main area of responsibility is institutional research.

Bennington broke ground in June 2009 on a $20 million Center for the Advancement of Public Action (CAPA). This building, to be completed in late fall 2010, will house a new curricular initiative focused on the current challenges of citizenship to match and enhance Bennington's historic commitment to the development of individual talent.

The building itself is sited intentionally in the midst of the campus; it will include a state-of-the-art conference facility, visiting faculty accommodations, workshop spaces and a faculty lounge. It will also house the field work term offices and the new environmental studies program.

This building will be financed with a $28,150,000 bond issued by the Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA). The first $20 million of this bond was issued in December 2008 with an interest rate of 3.67 percent, pursuant to an interest rate swap agreement. The remaining $8,150,000 was issued in May 2009, at an interest rate of 4.26 percent, pursuant to an interest rate swap agreement. In addition to providing funds for the construction and outfitting of CAPA, bond proceeds were used to defease existing debt of a little more than $7 million (bearing an interest rate of slightly more than 6.5 percent). That debt will be fully retired on October 1, 2009.

The College has two other external debt issues. The first is a $3 million, 15-year issue, at 3.96 percent, which provided funds to purchase and install a biomass boiler, substantially reducing our reliance on fuel oil for heating. The outstanding principal on this issue is $2,614,119, with the final bond payment due November 3, 2021. The second debt issue is the privately placed Bennington bonds. The outstanding principal amount on these bonds, also now defeased, is $190,350. These bonds will be fully retired on June 30, 2010.

The College continues to repay funds borrowed from the endowment in the mid-1990s. Since FY 2002 the College has reduced the amount borrowed from the endowment by $1,522,000. The unpaid amount as of June 30, 2009, is $4.812 million.

The College's other capital outlays come from internal funds, supplemented by significant gifts for campus renewal provided by a committed alumna. Working from a comprehensive list maintained by the vice president for planning and special programs, we select those projects that will be funded each fiscal year. We have spent additional funds totaling more than $6 million over the last five years from donated funds.

Since June 2005 the College's long-term investments have been managed by Hirtle, Callaghan, & Co., a firm that provides an outsourced investment operation for institutions whose size cannot support in-house investment management. We have entered at long last the world of long-term equity investments and, in so doing, have suffered the fate shared by most institutions—a decline, in our case, just shy of 30 percent in long-term investments. Needless to say, having worked for decades to get to the point of having resources to invest in long-term equities, it is painful to see those hard-fought dollars diminish. At the same time, the role of endowment income in our operating budget is negligible, thus requiring little or no adjustment in our operating budget.

The College's annual budget process begins in the late fall with budget materials and instructions distributed to departments. Budgets are prepared by each academic and administrative organizational unit within parameters established by and subject to the approval of the president and the executive vice president for finance and administration. After determining expected revenues, decisions regarding expenditure budgets are made. The annual budget is presented in May to the Finance and Audit Committee of the board. After its review and recommendations, the budget is submitted in June for approval by the board of trustees.

The Finance and Audit Committee meets quarterly and over the course of a year will review such matters as budget reports, tax filings (990, 990T), recommendations for tuition and other charges, and the annual audit report and management report from the College's external auditors. The committee will from time to time consider other pertinent matters, such as long-term debt financing proposals.

The College's planning process is ongoing and iterative. The president and a number of her senior staff meet periodically to review topics vital to the College's future. We have recently considered mission and market position; institutional infrastructure; revenue enhancement; and enrollment management. We prepare and update five-year budget models based on the results of these discussions and other data we find relevant. The board of trustees is engaged in this process as it unfolds and there is ongoing communication between the staff and the faculty as well. The decision to choose an enrollment of 750 as an optimal and realizable goal is one result of that planning process, as is a carefully developed strategy for improving retention and securing off- campus housing.

The executive vice president for finance and administration is the College's chief financial officer, responsible for all aspects of financial operations. The executive vice president also serves as the treasurer of the corporation. The business office, under his direction, performs most of the institutional tasks associated with the financial operations of the College. The business office is staffed by a controller, a budget manager, four other full-time personnel and a part-time clerk.

Based upon data in our Jenzabar software, the business office prepares monthly budget reports to all College budgetary units. Business office staff review these reports to ensure their accuracy and adherence to budget. The executive vice president for finance and administration deals with significant departures from budget.

The College's external auditors perform an annual audit of the College's financial statements. They routinely attend the September meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee, in which they present their report and findings for the year. As part of the September meeting, they have an executive session with committee members. In the last three years there has been one management letter comment.

Appraisal

Bennington's continued financial health depends in large part on two main sources of revenue: undergraduate enrollment and fundraising. In addition to maintaining a very high level of managerial competence and strategic intelligence in the offices of external relations and admissions, Bennington's major challenge is to improve continually our competitive position in the landscape of small liberal arts colleges. The new curricular initiative on advancing public action is designed to accomplish this. Its focus on major policy challenges enables us to exploit much more effectively the formidable pedagogical resources of the College in the sciences and the social sciences in addition to those in literature and the visual and performing arts. The recently received grant of $325,000 from the Mellon Foundation to launch an environmental studies program is one expression of its impact.

An orientation to the public good and the student as responsible citizen does two critical things: it attends to a long-lost agenda in American higher education and brings a new intensity to liberal arts education. We are confident that the intrinsic values of this orientation will translate into a robust and growing student body and make Bennington increasingly competitive for talented students in the numbers we will need to bring financial aid under greater control. Indeed, there is already evidence that we are attracting increasing numbers of students in our applicant pool with interests in the sciences and social sciences whom we would have had difficulty recruiting in the past because of the dominance of our reputation in the visual and performing arts and in literature.

As noted in Standard Eight, the College needs to replace our ERP system in the very near future. The current Jenzabar QX software is installed in a relatively small, and declining, number of institutions. There are missing links between applications and the student billing system is on homegrown software. Other than an ongoing business mapping project, we have held off starting the ERP replacement process until we had hired a chief information officer. Having just made that appointment, we expect to move forward quickly.

Projection

Given the radical uncertainties of the present economic scene, this is a difficult time to make projections. At this point we have good reason to be cautiously optimistic vis-à-vis both admissions and development; more current information will be available prior to the visit next November.

We can speak to several other variables now. A major campaign is being developed to increase the retention rate. We are hiring two full-time advisors who will focus on the needs of first-year students. The first-year advisors will help students use the academic and non-academic resources of the College to ensure an engaging and productive start to their college years. As a result of this initiative, we expect an increase in the first-year retention rate from the recent average of 75 percent to a goal of 86 percent by FY 2013. These changes will have a significant impact on revenue. So while this will require an initial investment in additional personnel, the financial return is potentially substantial.

We are comfortable with our relative position in the ranking of institutions by cost. In the current year we are ranked 24th if the comparison is made on comprehensive charges and 22nd if made on tuition and fees only. We expect our 3.9 percent increase for 2009–10 will leave us in approximately the same ranking next year. Our budget models through FY 2014 assume annual increases in tuition ranging from 3.5 percent to 5 percent.

The ongoing redesign of the College's curriculum is another moment of innovation that we expect will become key in the College's history. We believe that a course of study that joins the relevance of today's major issues with a liberal arts curriculum will prove highly attractive to students. We know that is so with donors, some of whom have already been moved by the power of this idea. The recent $20 million pledge was largely inspired by this new undertaking, as was the Mellon Foundation's recently awarded grant of $325,000 for an environmental studies program.

Bennington will continue to integrate our annual budget process with our planning process. We will adjust staffing, operational spending, and capital budgeting choices to reflect expected enrollment and fundraising expectations. The Investment Subcommittee of the board will monitor the performance of the recently revised investment plan.

We will soon commence the process of identifying a successor to our ERP software. We hope to have completed its installation within three years. One of the benefits from this system will be the ability to provide real-time data at the desktop of appropriate managers.

The business office will keep the Finance and Audit Committee and the board of trustees informed of pending changes in reporting requirements and regulations pertinent to their oversight role.

Given the uncertainties of the economic situation, all planning will be subject to continual review at the board and senior staff levels.

STANDARD TEN: PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

Description

Introduction

Bennington is committed to the highest standards in communicating with our constituencies, which include prospective students and their families, alumni, current students, faculty, staff, and the general public. The College publishes information about our mission, objectives, programs, academic structure, policies and procedures, and the activities of students, faculty, staff, and alumni in various print publications and on our public website. We are responsive to requests for information from the public, including information about financial matters, in compliance with government regulations.

In summer 2009 the office of communications 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 our two primary local newspapers—the *Bennington Banner* and *Rutland Herald*—as well as other regional media, and followed the suggested wording provided by NEASC. A similar notice was printed in the Winter 2009 issue of *Bennington*, the alumni magazine. Internal notifications were provided to the Bennington community at intervals throughout the self-study process.

Operations and Publications

The office of communications oversees most aspects of public information for Bennington, including media relations, the public website, and publications for prospective students and their families, alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends. It reports directly to the president's office.

The website is the primary source for information about the College. In addition to information about Bennington's mission and history, it includes basic institutional facts such as degrees conferred, the size and characteristics of the student body, current tuition and fees, refund policies, accreditation status, and campus location. It provides detailed listings of current faculty, their qualifications, and courses offered currently and in previous and upcoming terms. The website describes the academic structure, resources available to students, requirements for graduation, and regulations for student conduct. Admissions criteria, policies relating to the transfer of credit, and financial aid data, including average student indebtedness, are available online, along with application instructions. A listing of notable alumni, a timeline chronicling key moments in Bennington's history, and regularly updated profiles of current students, faculty, and graduates provide a window into the people who study and teach here.

From the website's home page, visitors can link to contact information for offices and specific individuals at the College. The office of communications monitors the website's general email account, linked from every page of the website, and responds to or redirects inquiries as appropriate. Prospective students can email current students directly from the "Ask a Student" page. The trustees and administrative officers are clearly listed under "College Leadership." And the "News" page, also linked from the home page, provides contact information for media.

Portals for current students, alumni, parents, faculty, and staff offer information and tools specific to particular constituencies, some of which are password-protected for secure online transactions.

The student handbook, updated for students each year, outlines in detail expectations and policies related to student conduct, academic performance, and field work term. *Bennington* magazine keeps alumni and friends abreast of current College developments, and the fall issue features an annual list of donors along with basic fundraising financials. Other publications produced by the College for marketing purposes, such as the admissions viewbook or direct mail "e-cards," reflect Bennington's mission and purposes to every extent possible.

The office of communications, together with the offices that use these materials regularly, reviews and updates them routinely—most annually, and the website on an ongoing basis. It works closely with the management information analyst in the business office, who oversees the College's annual data collection and reporting activities, to keep information current and respond to external surveys and requests for information.

Appraisal

In 2003, Bennington replaced the first generation of our website, designed primarily for prospective students conducting online searches, with a comprehensive website to serve the needs of all our constituencies. In launching this site, we began to shift the center of our communications operations from print to web. This shift has allowed for better integration of the various communications serving the College's multiple constituencies, an integration that was furthered when the office of communications began reporting directly to the president's office in 2006.

In fall 2008, we undertook a significant website redesign, including a new open-source content management system that better represents the range and depth of the College's academic offerings. Without conventional structures such as majors and departmental requirements, the challenge is for Bennington to make clear to prospective students what it means to plan an individual course of study. The versatility of the new content management system makes it possible to create pages for the various academic disciplines—complete with samples of student Plans, links to faculty biographies and course offerings, field work term opportunities, and examples of what students do after graduating—that give a clearer picture of the total academic experience. As appropriate, these examples link to other discipline pages and information about the academic structure, illustrating the interdisciplinary and dynamic nature of a Bennington education.

Finally, the new content management system allows the web administrator to set triggers for routine updates and to establish levels of approval required for designated users to publish to the site. When the comprehensive site was first launched in 2003, these kinds of administrative functions were not deployed. The content management system conversion has provided an opportunity to implement such protocols to ensure currency, accuracy, and integrity throughout the site.

While the new website serves as a central source of information for a wide range of audiences (primarily external, e.g., prospective students and their families), we need to expand its content potential. We have not yet maximized the website's potential as a vibrant *intra*net. The College does offer a limited number of password-protected, web-based tools to key constituencies—faculty members can view their class rosters, alumni can search for fellow alumni, students can review their current course registrations—but more complex functionalities have not yet been deployed.

As the College's institutional research functions expand through the work of the Institutional Research Committee and the newly created position of associate provost for planning, research, and assessment, there will be increased opportunities to publish data about the student experience, both for internal use and for the public.

The recently expanded Higher Education Act mandates that we increase significantly information available to the public. We, like other colleges, are engaged in the effort to understand the complicated changes and timeline so that we can implement them responsibly.

Projection

The College will continue to maximize our website's potential as a central source of information. With the public site now well established, the College will focus on making our intranet more comprehensive and on adding more functionality for users. Already, we have begun to review ERP systems that will allow for greater integration with student and faculty portals; evaluating and implementing such systems are a priority for our institutional technology operations.

As part of its annual review of materials, the office of communications will continue to consider whether content that is currently in print only, or both in print and online, might only be published on the website. While some materials are most properly published as printed pieces, others could benefit from the wider distribution, currency, and immediacy of the website. Among the information currently under consideration are sections of the faculty handbook and elements of the College's fact book, which is being developed by the Institutional Research Committee. We also will be working to integrate the emerging regulatory requirements of the new Higher Education Act through collaboration between communications, the registrar, and institutional research.

Institutional Effectiveness

The College's website and publications undergo regular and systematic review to ensure their accuracy, integrity, and availability. To inform this analysis, the College routinely collects data on the effectiveness of communications. Surveys of prospective students tell us that our communications are clear and compelling; nearly 80 percent of respondents to the 2008 admitted students' questionnaire rated the quality of information provided by our publications, electronic communication, and website as either very good or excellent. Finally, the College's website and publications have consistently won excellence awards from industry and design professionals, including the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, the University and College Designers Association, and the Webby Awards.

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 lies at the heart of Bennington's academic, administrative, and social practices.

The College'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 secondary education. The College observes the spirit as well as the letter of all obligations set forth in our charter from the state of Vermont, and makes ongoing efforts to notify the community of all applicable legal requirements and standards. The registrar takes advantage of professional development opportunities through AACRAO to stay current with FERPA rules and implementation procedures. Each year the provost and 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 developed a policy for official email communications in 2006.

Conferences held on campus reflect our abiding mission and rich history in educating citizens with respect for diversity of opinion. Some examples include a "Living Democracy: Perspectives from South Africa" conference in March 2005 and "Learning Democracy Conference" in October 2005. The South African event brought to the campus a group of former South African leaders who discussed the many lessons learned during the transition from apartheid rule to a new democratic order. Five nations that had undergone a democratic transition were represented at the "Learning Democracy" conference: Argentina, Indonesia, Poland, South Africa, and Turkey.

- *Publications.* In our dealings with students, faculty, staff, external organizations, and the public-at-large, Bennington strives to adhere to high 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 rigorous approval process within the institution and are reviewed by the senior advisor and special assistant to the president.

- *Academic Freedom.* Academic freedom is a cornerstone of Bennington's educational philosophy, as evidenced in our academic freedom policy published in the faculty handbook (page 21). Since its inception, the College has fostered faculty members' intellectual passions through its curriculum. Students are asked to pursue the areas that most engage them as well.

- *Board.* The College is legally governed by the board of trustees, which is responsible for directing and managing its affairs, funds, and property. The structure of the board is detailed in Standard Three, including details on our conflict of interest policy and recent revisions to the by-laws.

- *Faculty.* Evolving over the past 10 years are new faculty leave and sabbatical policies, the peer review process, faculty grievance policy and procedures, and the academic freedom policy in the faculty handbook (page 21). These policies are compiled in the faculty handbook and distributed to all faculty members. A substantial review and subsequent restructuring of the handbook in 2006 incorporated a number of more general College policies, academic procedures, and faculty benefit policies. In spring 2008, efforts were undertaken by the provost and dean, associate dean for academic affairs, and assistant dean for budget and administration to bring policies more in line with actual practices, a process that led to numerous policy updates and revisions, including those concerning the Academic Policies Committee, Curriculum Planning Committee, Committee on Research Using Human Subjects, and copyright policy. Subsequent to these revisions and review by College counsel, the 2008 faculty handbook was reprinted and distributed to faculty.

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 new faculty upon arrival. Substantive revisions of existing policies are reviewed by faculty, as appropriate, and once finalized, are distributed to the entire faculty.

In addition, the provost and dean and associate dean for academic affairs 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 Committee on Research Using Human Subjects.

- *Staff.* 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 disciplinary processes. Over the last several years, specific policies have been updated to reflect changes in College policy and to ensure compliance with changing legislation. At present, the handbook is being reviewed and updated. The anticipated completion date for the revised handbook is July 2009. Each new staff member is given a staff handbook and participates in an orientation session with the office of human resources. Letters of appointment provided for all staff clearly state general job responsibilities, reporting structure, terms of employment, and compensation. Orientation consists of a review of College policies and procedures, payroll orientation, and, where applicable, safety information/training and benefits orientation. Most policies for unionized staff appear in the union bargaining agreement. The current bargaining agreement covers the period of July 1, 2007, through June 30, 2011.

- *Students.* The requirements, academic expectations, guidelines, rules, and regulations for students are published annually in the student handbook, prepared by the student life office in collaboration with the dean's office and others 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. Regular sexual harassment awareness workshops by the College's legal counsel are required for all staff and faculty, the most recent in 2008. A clear explanation of what constitutes academic dishonesty is included in the student handbook under "Academic and Artistic Ethics," along with an explicit procedure for handling suspected cases of plagiarism. This procedure was under review and revised in spring-fall 2008 by a committee of staff, faculty, and students.

  The Judicial Committee, described fully in the student handbook, deals with violations of the student conduct code, behavior that may threaten the health, well-being, or safety of the College. Student, staff, and faculty members on the committee are trained 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 student infractions, are also clearly delineated in the handbook, as are appeal processes for all disciplinary proceedings.

- *Anti-discrimination.* 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 online and in professional journals. Performance evaluations are regularly conducted for most support staff; evaluations of professional staff are ongoing throughout the year.

- *Diversity.* For the last 20 years, Bennington's student body has represented a rich mix of economic backgrounds. Just under 80 percent of students receive some form of financial aid, and in 2007, Bennington was on a top-ten list of colleges with students receiving Pell grants. In spite of limited

financial aid resources, the College funds $10,378,000 in aid to needy and qualified students. Over each of the last three years, the racial composition has improved, from 5 percent racial minorities in 2006 to 7.3 percent in 2008. The entering class of 2008 was composed of 9 percent students of color and 10 percent international/dual citizenship students. Geographically, Bennington draws students from more than 30 states across the country (with concentrations in the Northeast and New York regions and solid representation from California) and from 17 different countries (4 percent of the student body is international). For the last two decades, Bennington has enrolled about 70 percent women. The incoming class for fall 2008, however, was composed of 65 percent women and 35 percent men. Faculty composition is 62 percent men and 38 percent women, 5 percent international, and 14 percent under-represented groups. In 2008, 2.5 percent of the staff was composed of racial minorities. Bennington participated in the NSSE 2008 Mission Engagement Consortium for Independent Colleges led by Marywood University with support through the Teagle Foundation. Students who took the NSSE survey were asked some additional questions regarding "respect for diversity," among other things. Bennington students ranked better than the consortium average in noting respect for people of different religions, races, cultures, and sexual orientation.

- *Other.* The president, provost and dean, associate dean for academic services, dean of students, and associate dean for academic affairs hold open hours each week. The college physician writes regular articles in the school newspaper addressing current health issues on campus. As needed, community memos are distributed alerting the campus to immediate health concerns. The campus Health Committee meets regularly to discuss ongoing health issues and programming.

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

  Various members of the staff and faculty have participated as reviewers on NEASC teams for other colleges in recent years. At the invitation of NEASC, one staff member presented at a NEASC conference on assessment at the annual meeting in 2006. The College informs itself regularly about changes in NEASC policies and procedures and remains in contact as needed with regional representatives. Annually, the College completes and returns a form to NEASC so that activities which relate to accreditation may be monitored between site evaluations.

Appraisal

In recent years, the College has made significant efforts to design and implement policies and training programs to ensure that our activities are carried out with integrity and in an ethical manner. An enhanced annual sexual harassment training program for all new faculty, technical staff, and other employees is in place. Alcohol policy awareness for new faculty and teaching technical assistants is implemented annually, as is consistent enforcement of alcohol policy violations. The College has engaged in a number of employee training initiatives as well, to assist staff in more efficiently managing their responsibilities. A new committee, the Faculty Grievance Committee, was created to resolve differences between faculty members. (Grievances for faculty reviews were and are in place.) The faculty handbook was revised in August 2008. Ongoing, comprehensive review of the faculty, student, and staff handbooks is needed to ensure uniformity of College policies.

The student handbook, reviewed and updated annually, clearly defines College policies, tenets of student behavior, and avenues for appeal of adjudicated decision. When incidents of plagiarism or cheating occur, students are confronted by the faculty directly and by the associate dean for academic services.

Diversity has historically been a challenge for Bennington because of the College's size, location, educational structure, and limited financial aid resources. The College has identified diversity (race, economic, geographic, gender, and academic interest) as a priority in our strategic plan. A Diversity Committee has been formed and is co-chaired by the dean of admissions and financial aid, the dean of students, and the associate dean for academic affairs. Together, they are working with various constituents within the College and alumni community to increase diversity on campus. Diversity plans for admissions include minority grants, activities in particular geographic regions, and targeted recruitment strategies for students of color. We are also focusing additional effort on attending to the sometimes difficult experience of the student of color within the Bennington community. As

noted earlier, when we learned from a recent graduate's thesis on alumni perspectives on race at Bennington that the student experience of color was sometimes troubling, we decided to support her research beyond graduation and beyond the initial group of alumni interviewed. Her updated report is now available.

The College actively welcomes applications from members of under-represented groups and has taken steps in recent years to improve racial and cultural diversity through targeted advertising, increased use of sabbaticals and leave opportunities to diversify faculty, and consistent encouragement and monitoring of cultural and racial diversity in the search and curriculum development processes. As noted previously, the dance program has implemented a world cultures guest artist program that featured, in 2008, for example Butoh dancers from Japan, a Zimbabwean soloist, and a Caribbean contemporary teacher/performer/choreographer.

As for staff recruiting, we have expanded our advertising efforts to reach under-represented groups. Specifically, higheredjobs.com offers a diversity e-blast targeting minority candidates; we advertise through them for most exempt-level positions. We also use Women in Development (WID) specifically to recruit women seeking development/fundraising positions. In addition, we advertise in local, free publications to recruit candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

In February 2008, we were part of a state-wide program, Disability Mentoring Day. As part of that initiative, members of the community who have disabilities were invited to campus to spend the day with facilities management staff learning about work functions and responsibilities. We have teamed up with several local organizations (including the State of Vermont Vocational Rehabilitation and United Counseling Services) to promote and seek employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. We have successfully hired two individuals through these programs.

Projection

To further the College's commitment to integrity, we will create a committee to review annually the staff handbook, student handbook, and faculty handbook together to ensure consistency.

A joint effort between admissions and the dean's office is focused on trying to improve diversity within the student body, faculty, and administration, as well as to offer a wider range of cultural exposure through visitors and programming of various kinds. At the beginning of each term, a steering committee comprised of the dean of admissions and financial aid, the dean of students, and the associate dean for academic affairs meets to review progress from the prior term and set goals for the upcoming term.

Current plans for the diversity initiative include:

Institutional Planning
- Name diversity as an integral part of the new five-year institutional strategic plan; clearly communicate our goals to board, students, faculty, and staff
- Continue work of senior-level steering committee to plan and review progress
- Create clear annual goals, with evaluation to determine success

Admissions
- Identify students of color within our inquiry and applicant pools to ensure they have a full understanding of Bennington and its programs
- Focus on developing relationships with community organizations and small charter schools in regional territories (New England, New York, California)
- Expand travel into broader geographic regions, such as the south and southwest, where we might find greater diversity of applicants
- Increase efforts to recruit international students
- Strive to increase gender balance through more strategic purchasing of names and attention during the recruitment process

Financial Aid
- Ensure that need is met for academically qualified applicants of color who apply for aid
- Create special scholarship incentives for students of color and international students

Faculty and Academic Life
- Prioritize diversity within faculty searches and sabbatical replacements (see Standard 5)
- Bring more diverse speakers and other campus visitors for short periods of time
- Work with faculty through the Curriculum Planning Committee to develop courses that recognize a broad range of cultures and perspectives
- Work with organizations to create FWT opportunities in which Bennington students connect with diverse communities; develop faculty-FWT connections with design labs to identify appropriate kinds of field work opportunities

Student Life
- Increase diversity-focused programming, such as international coffee hour, women's and men's leadership programs, off-campus events in Albany, Saratoga, and elsewhere
- Incorporate diversity training into leadership structures on campus, such as with house chairs
- Collaborate with other local colleges on diversity: Southern Vermont College, Williams College, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

Human Resources
- Prioritize diversity whenever possible within all administrative searches

As the applicant pool grows, the College hopes to continue its progress toward expanding diversity within the student body, with a goal of achieving 10 percent people of color and 5 percent international students by 2012.

As noted, we also intend to complete our initial research on the campus diversity climate, focusing on the extended thesis project by a recent graduate. We intend to use this research to prompt a series of discussions on campus on topics of race and the environment on campus, led by the dean of students. Once we have more information from current students of color about their experiences, we intend to consider how these issues might affect orientation and advising, in particular. We are committed to providing a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all students and will work hard to identify, discuss, and address problems.

The associate dean for academic affairs, dean of students, and director of human resources will schedule an annual review of policies and documents and distribute revisions to faculty, staff, and students.

Institutional Effectiveness

We are committed to regular and intensive reviews of our policies and procedures, involving members of the College community. We maintain a strong emphasis on ongoing staff and faculty orientation, workshops, and training, and strive for a culture of openness and collaboration. Another avenue for insuring institutional effectiveness is by employing engaged and competent outside legal counsel, the same attorney for more than 20 years. By seeking her advice, as necessary and appropriate, the College has stayed abreast of changes to educational law and is diligent in creating and following sound policies, procedures, and ethical practices.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE