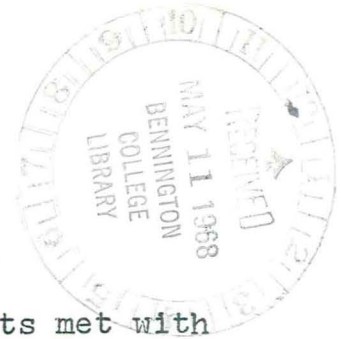


PROPOSAL TO:

Mr. Bloustein
Mr. Brown
Mr. Pearson

FROM:

Vicky English
~~Vea~~ Neumann
Felicity Wright



On Saturday, April 27, 1968, several students met with Mrs. Robert Guttman, an alumna, to discuss feelings of discontent and the need for changes within the Bennington community. The discussion centered around anachronisms in the present structure, the shortcomings of class discussion (due to class size and other factors,) and the difficulty of incorporating other educational experiences into the system.

The present drop-out rate is a symptom of this dissatisfaction. The issue of coeducation and its implications for intellectual and social enrichment were discussed. Implied in the meeting was a deep-rooted fear that the Bennington community was "out-of-focus"; that it was failing to stimulate social and intellectual commitment.

To tackle these problems, three of us met again the following week. We now propose two major changes: (1) the addition of a summer term and the reorganization of existing terms; (2) an exchange program of students, graduate students, and faculty.

I. The reorganization of the terms would result in three rotating terms of fourteen weeks each, whereby a student, in four years, would ordinarily complete eight academic terms and (three or) four Non-Resident Terms. The scheduling would be as follows:

First Term: Sept. 11 (or nearest Monday) to Dec. 15 (or nearest Friday)

Second Term: Jan. 15 -- April 19

Third Term: May 13 -- Aug. 16

Such an adaptation would have numerous advantages:

a. The economic advantages are clear: The maintenance costs, which continue throughout the year, would be used constructively. It would also allow for a larger student body without a corresponding increase in full-time faculty.

b. The educational advantages are still more significant. Both students and faculty would have an opportunity to do outside work of a more satisfactory nature than is presently available; NRT employment (during any one of the three terms) would be more productive for both student and employer. For the student, it could mean more than "adjustment to the vocational world"; for the employer, rotating NRTs could mean year-round assistance.

II. The proposed term structure would also facilitate exchange programs with other colleges. We would hope that Bennington students would be free to spend time at other colleges, and other qualified graduate and undergraduate students would be welcomed at Bennington for one or more terms. (The same could be true of faculty members.) This would have, again, obvious economic and educational advantages:

a. The possible lack of students (due to NRTs) in any one term could be met through this exchange program.

b. Graduate students could teach as well as take classes, lessening the need for a larger faculty and the expenses thus incurred. Furthermore, it would be possible to have a larger student body (without destroying the individualization) thus adding to college income.

c. The educational advantages are still more obvious. With graduate students, there could be smaller classes and less

strain on resident professors. With visiting faculty and students, we would have ipso facto, more diversity of experiences. We would also have, ipso facto, a certain amount of coeducation yet without the concern for qualified men. Both graduate and undergraduate men could come for one or more terms without the fear of the "total Bennington effect" upon their career. For Bennington students, many could go elsewhere for one or two terms without being obliged to leave altogether, as many presently do. This would diversify the student's experiences while making the Bennington idea more permanent.

We also considered other changes that should be instituted regardless of the acceptance of the two major proposals.

They are:

1. Students who have come in contact with the Student Personnel Office have noticed that, while it is functioning to its fullest capacity, it is not exercising its greatest potential. Thus, we propose that the Student Personnel Office be expanded to include at least three offices. The first office, similar to a university records office, would handle transcripts. The second office would provide career assistance for students who wish to take courses at other schools as part of the exchange program. The third division would handle student living situations, as it does now. Other possibilities for expansion of this office would involve its use by faculty and administration.
2. In the past few years, the counselling system has come into question. In order to state boundaries for the duties of the counsellor and full educational interaction between him and the student, an extension of the mental health department would

be necessary. This would make the professional psychological and psychiatric care available to the student, thus alleviating the burden on the counsellor, who, more often than not, does not value the role of a father-confessor.

3. Considering the panel system, we recommend that one panel, consisting of the student's freshman professors and counselor (and possibly one faculty member unacquainted with the student) meet at the end of her first year, to discuss the breath of her courses. She would be responsible to that panel for her first two years. In her upperclass years, she would only be responsible to her division. Moreover, we recommend that students who wish to may present their plans in person.

4. In place of compulsory mid-term comments we suggest appointments with each teacher twice a term to discuss work, followed by compulsory final comments. (Mid-term comments might remain optional at the request of the student.)

5. Concerning financial aid, we suggest that, as there are more students desirous of financial aid than there are finances available, more loans should be given directly to the student, as are most government loans, (as the only democratic solution to the problem of financial assistance).

In summarizing, our attempt in the two major proposals is to expand the operation of the college while still maintaining its unique size and location. At this point, such flexibility is not easily available at Bennington. Its lack was the underlying concern of the alumna who feared that "history might pass Bennington by" (in the latest Quadrille); its availability is one of the underlying concepts of a Bennington education.

Second to our concern for educational opportunity is our awareness of financial problem which face both the college and students. We feel that, with the inception of these two major proposals, government and foundation grants might become available.

The natural result of these proposed actions would be that full individual growth would be economically inculcated in the college community in the form of a "jumping-off base"-- to and from other educational experiences. Rather than a college as a place to go to, it would become a place to come out of, and would, incidentally solve the many other problems besetting the Bennington education.

We believe these proposals are basic to the Bennington philosophy and relevant to the ~~mainstream~~ of American social awareness and educational thought.

We have also considered some of the practical changes and methodology that are already implicit, but rather than become overly lengthy in this outline proposal, we would prefer to annotate such recommendations either verbally in discussion or later after greater thought by the total community. Please feel free to contact any one of us.

cc: Faculty
Administration
Ad Hoc Committee
Student EPC
Coeducation Committee
Constitutional Council