

**P.O.V.**

**point of view**

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**on**

**bennington college**

## editor's note:

In assembling this magazine, one of the recurring themes of the collected articles became evident. Bennington students become totally involved in their work and this immersion makes the establishment of an objective distance difficult. People at the college spend a large part of their free time talking about Bennington because it has become a part of their lives. This obsession to define what Bennington is can be seen in these pages. These articles are by no means a totally comprehensive view of Bennington, for that would be impossible to collect within the pages of a magazine. This publication was put together to provide the potential applicant with a view of the college different from that found in the catalogue; something like the random conversations one might pick up while visiting the campus. It is wholly the view of students, and this perspective on the college is therefore as irreverent and griping as it is praising and serious. This is the only way to present the Bennington "reality."

We want to thank Alex Brown, Director of Publications, without whose tireless efforts this students' point of view would not exist.

Nicholas Stevens  
Sharon Elliott

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## P.O.V.



**students on bennington college**



# the campus

There is a beauty about the college that sometimes surpasses all understanding. I'm not sure what it is exactly. I think I knew when I was a freshman, but now my mind hazes. As one finds one's work, becomes more and more involved, one ceases to be at Bennington and becomes instead part of it. One fits in, becomes a piece of the puzzle.

Tina Davidson





We don't really live in dorms, rather houses of twenty to thirty people. Four to eight rooms share a bathroom and are called suites. Every house has at least one kitchen, equipped with a sink, refrigerator and hot plate. Five of the seventeen houses have ovens; why they all don't is a matter of some contention.

All houses have living rooms where some classes meet, coffee hours take place and, once in a while, more often toward the end of the term, communal all-nighters go on. (The idea being that it's easier to stay awake working with others than by yourself, even if it is more distracting and potentially hilarious.)

Sunny Benenson



The campus houses are friendly little wooden structures significantly unlike the cinder block caves in which students at larger schools struggle in vain to maintain consciousness. Each house has about thirty people in it. These people usually get to know each other pretty well. Each week, the house surges to the climactic coffee hour. This is when everybody comes, as if possessed, to the living room and eats. There is much more to this event than simple mastication, though. At this time the collective unconscious of the house melds into a harmonious glop and all is at peace. It is the social event of the week.

Hardy Kornfeld

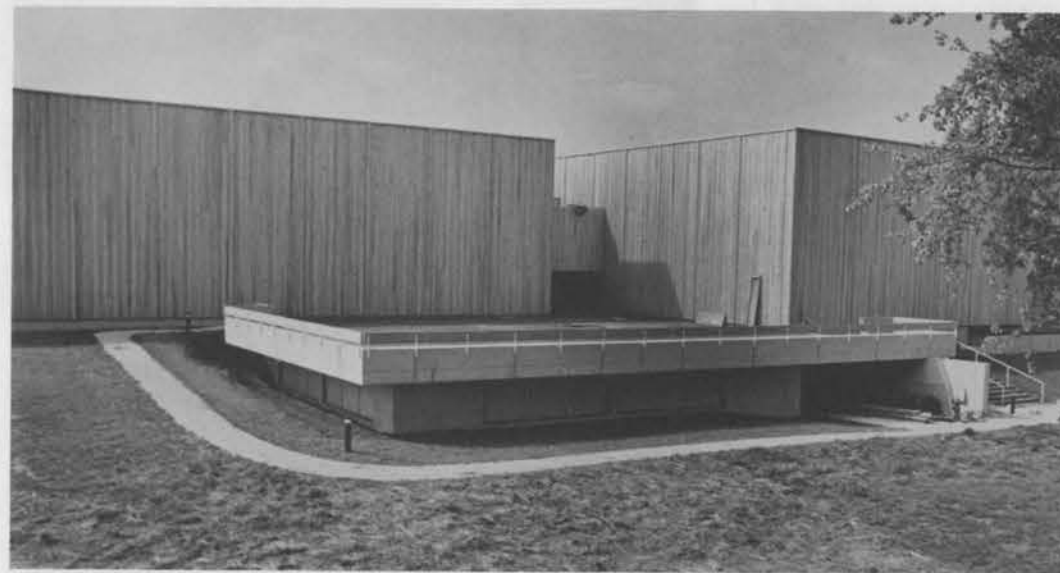






The college now includes a building called VAPA (which stands for Visual and Performing Arts). This new, giant arts center still has a few bugs in it, but for the most part is a very functional and flexible building. The thing I like about it is that you can always watch what other people are doing when you're sick of what you're doing yourself. When standing in the three-story-high galleria, you can see five studios: graphics, sculpture, and ceramics on the bottom floor, and a painting studio and a drawing studio on the second floor. Not only is this arrangement convenient, it makes for a feeling of camaraderie.

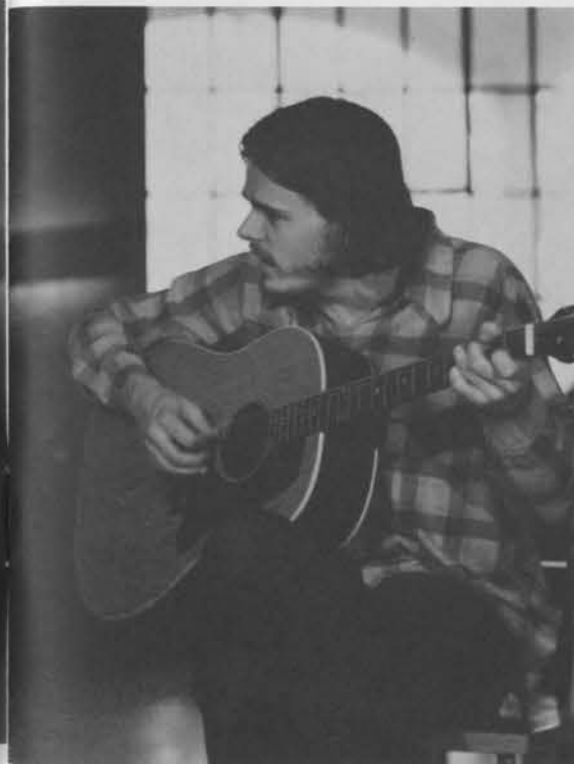
Amy Sawelson





Commons lounge is the college's principal hang-out. Convenient to Post Office, snack bar and dining room, it is difficult to avoid visiting this zone less than six or seven times a day. The ambience is depressingly reminiscent of a bus station. Kill time here between the departure of "Continuity and Change in Pre-Industrial Europe" and the arrival of "The Wor(l)d of the Novel." Styrofoam ubiquitous. The view, however, is magnificent.

Michael Pollan



One might say that the physical campus verges on the idyllic. It is a tasteful combination of old estate buildings, such as the Barn (which is just that, and currently houses classrooms and offices) and Jennings (the stone mansion where reside the musicians), and the new cedar-sided extravaganzas like the Visual and Performing Arts Center. All this, plus 500-some acres to frolic about in, sundry trees and shrubs, and a beautiful graveyard just over the hill for those melancholy moments. Seriously, though, the external attributes of the college are numerous and indeed breathtaking; just watch out for the mud during the rainy season and enjoy the plenitude of stars.

Shawn MacKenzie





# academia

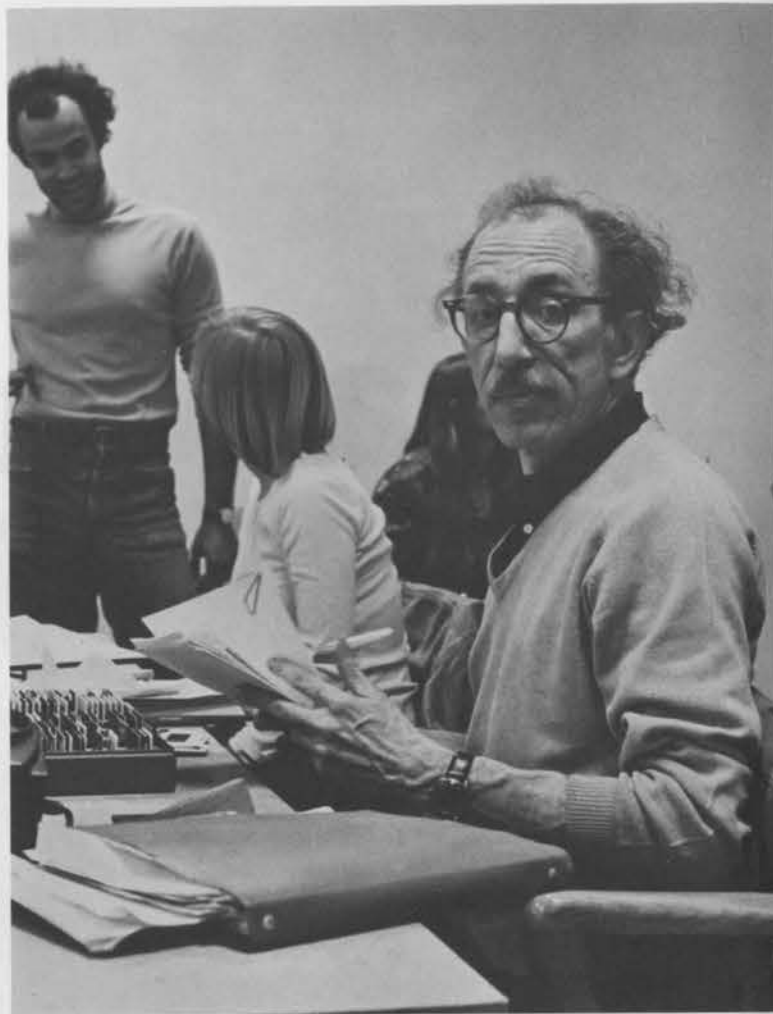
Classes are small and personal, and the instructors are in close contact with the students. Teachers at Bennington are uniquely approachable and available. I truly enjoy the personal attention and feel it's one of the college's greatest attributes. I feel that the faculty members really care, and once you get to know some of them well, they'll really pull for you when you need it.

Amy Sawelson

I don't think I've ever heard anyone refer to a student here as a "nurd" or a "grind." Rather than receive the conventional denunciations, hard-working little gnomes are widely considered worthy of adulation. Work is a fetish here. If only by virtue of a bastard version of peer-group pressure, you are likely to find yourself working incredibly hard. If you don't, you run the risk of terminal boredom. Whatever social hierarchy there is at Bennington is largely constituted according to academic and artistic accomplishment. This is what people admire. Work occupies a central place in everybody's life.

Michael Pollan





If you come here, as I did, from a large state university, you will at first be alarmed by how few courses there seem to be in each subject. After being here for a while, though, you will find that what the courses lack in breadth they make up for in depth. Each subject is explored much more thoroughly and sensitively than at a big, regular school. You may learn about fewer subjects, but you'll learn so much more about those subjects. Quality as opposed to quantity. No survey classes here. The subject matter is ambitious and stimulating.

Amy Sawelson

I was just flipping through the college catalogue, looking for the descriptions of all the courses I have taken here. I couldn't find them. Then I remembered why I had it so good here—I took tutorials. Tutorials are fantasy courses. You get to know the faculty in your division and talk to them about what you want to study and how and why. You work out with them what you need from the educational process and a tutorial is constructed around subject matter or techniques you feel you need to acquire. Obviously, they're not going to approve every bizarre notion you may have for academic credit, but generally things are worked out, involving you and as many other students as are intrigued by the idea. Because of this flexibility, the catalogue isn't going to tell you the whole story about what you may study here. Sometimes these tutorials are set up to fill gaps in the curriculum or broaden what's been approached in class, but for the most part they reflect the initiative and educational goals of the students. I know of no other place where students are so encouraged to learn to think on their own terms.

Alex Brown



Papers (research, critical, creative) take on an additional weight at Bennington because we do not have exams or tests; they become projects as opposed to the kind of one-draft essays and term papers splashed out before college.

Sunny Benenson



The small size of classes, the counseling arrangement, and the chance to go and talk to an instructor whenever I need to has been important to me. Each student is paired with a faculty counselor, and after his first term decides which instructor he wants to work with. There is a designated counseling hour every Wednesday when all instructors are to be found in their offices, where they help students set up schedules and plan their majors. They're available to talk to if difficulties arise. These counseling arrangements are there if you want or need them, and I personally have found them very useful. Being able to establish this kind of relationship with teachers is one of the aspects of Bennington I value a great deal. The doubts and confusions I have had about my work and myself, especially during my freshman year, would never have been resolved so easily and quickly if I had not been able to have this kind of direct contact with my instructors. I believe I am learning more easily in this atmosphere than I might elsewhere.

Cynthia Browning

Being a transfer student at Bennington has both positive and negative sides. The plus side includes the fact that it is highly possible to transfer here as a sophomore and not have to take an extra term or any extra courses, because credits don't accumulate here as they do at most "normal" institutions.

The negative side is that you often don't find out what your standing is until the last possible moment, when instead of an impartial computer adding up your 120 credits, your professors discuss your worth over tea and cookies.

Jan Cherubin



There is a lot of unscheduled time here—you may spend only an hour and a half in class each day—and freshmen often have difficulty using all that extra time to get things done. There is an incredible amount of work to do and no one standing over you to tell you to do it. By the time one is a junior or senior, one has *learned* to read that assignment as soon as it's given or to paint every day. I'm a senior now and have only recently started to be efficient.

Amy Sawelson



It's a small community here. Bennington students have a reputation for being anti-social. Not surprising. Any individual absorbed in his or her work is bound to be. Dedication and persistence in learning breed an isolation of sorts.

Tina Davidson

Students here are usually serious about their work and dedicated to their personal development. This encourages you to make a deeper commitment to yourself than you might otherwise make. But when the atmosphere of intensity reaches a peak it can get depressing here. It's easy to get into a negative, self-analytical frame of mind if you don't maintain some perspective on yourself; that is, remembering who you really are when you're outside this place. I've grown a lot at Bennington, both intellectually and emotionally, but it's been a struggle . . . a worthwhile struggle.

a student

Even though I have yet to land a particularly worthwhile or lucrative NRT job, I find the break and prolonged exposure to the outside world valuable. Life at Bennington is too ideal; the balance of school terms, summers and NRTs is necessary to maintain any kind of perspective.

Heidi Holman



I have mixed feelings about the Non Resident Term. Basically, it's extremely difficult to find a paying job and a decent place to live for just two months in the winter. But if you can, the experience is definitely worth the trip. Sometimes you forget that you can live by yourself, support yourself, and be out there, living your life. There is a tendency to forget this, I think, and NRT serves as a good reminder. But even if you are not totally independent during NRT, is it possible to set aside two months for anything and not learn something? I doubt it.

Tamio Spiegel





# the divisions

The Black Music Division is a unified and unique division at Bennington. There seems to be a goal that the whole division is working toward. This goal might be partially expressed as the furthering of an "art" music based on the work of black musicians such as Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, and Cecil Taylor, to name-drop just a few. I say "partially expressed" because the division is obviously part of the school, and therefore one of the other aspects of the division's unified goal is to pass on to students the basic tenets of an aesthetic that is different from those of Beethoven, Wagner, Stockhausen, et al. Enough of this lofty talk of aesthetics and art; the division also teaches the basic things you need to know to play music. Little things like scales, rhythms and how to read music are basic steps in one's ability to express oneself artistically. (Yes, Virginia, I know it sounds like a confusing hodgepodge the first time you hear it, but they've got music stands in front of them so they must know what they're doing. Why would I lie?)

Black Music is no longer Louis Armstrong singing "Hello Dolly." At one point it might have been but Black Music is an ever growing, expanding art form. It is controversial within and without the school. In my opinion the Black Music Division deals successfully with a wide variety of musicians with a wide variety of skills. The uniqueness of Black Music helps to maintain the uniqueness of Bennington.

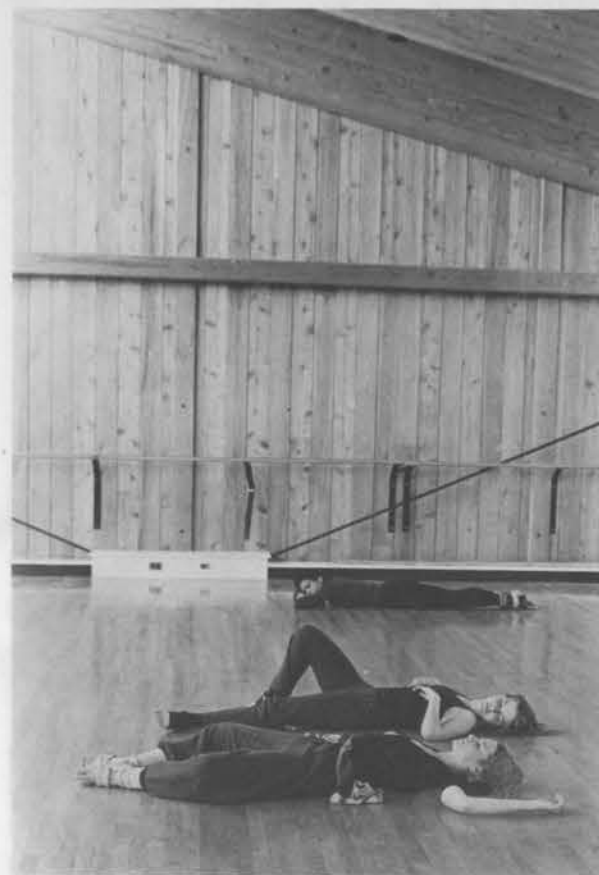
Larry Jacobs





I am not a dance major, but I have taken two quarters of dance and I feel that the division is one of the really good and *unusual* things about this college. There is an openness in the division allowing truly free choreography and performing experiences that has been very good for me.

Cynthia Browning



The approach to teaching and learning dance at Bennington is an individualistic one. A dancer is not simply taught how to move like someone else but is taught to explore and develop individual strengths and style. Dance here is not only a physical experience. Each dancer is asked and encouraged to develop an emotional and intellectual understanding in addition to a physical understanding of movement, space, time, form; all aspects of dance.

Individual expression through choreography is important here, and the opportunity for dancers to collaborate with musicians in producing pieces is great. A dancer also learns the technical aspects of producing a dance—crew and tech requirements mean, among other things, learning how to plug, hang, and focus lights and build sets.

Sos Roehrich



The Drama Division at Bennington is a seeming miracle. From chaos comes order; from long hours, good work; from madness, method. And very few people outside the division understand how everything happens here, but it does.

It's not an academic division—you won't be handed stacks of books and theatrical theories. You will study technique and most of all have the chance to use that technique on stage. Recognizing the principle that there comes a time when classroom training must be furthered with practice, we are a production-oriented division. We draw on all the resources of the faculty and students, and discover new resources in the process. Students write, direct, act, and design, and see that work produced. So does the faculty.

Theatre at Bennington is the product of a commitment to the art and a love of the process involved in learning that art. We don't mount Broadway productions—that is not our function. We fight for our lives, fall flat on our faces, work hard, and work well.

Shawn MacKenzie

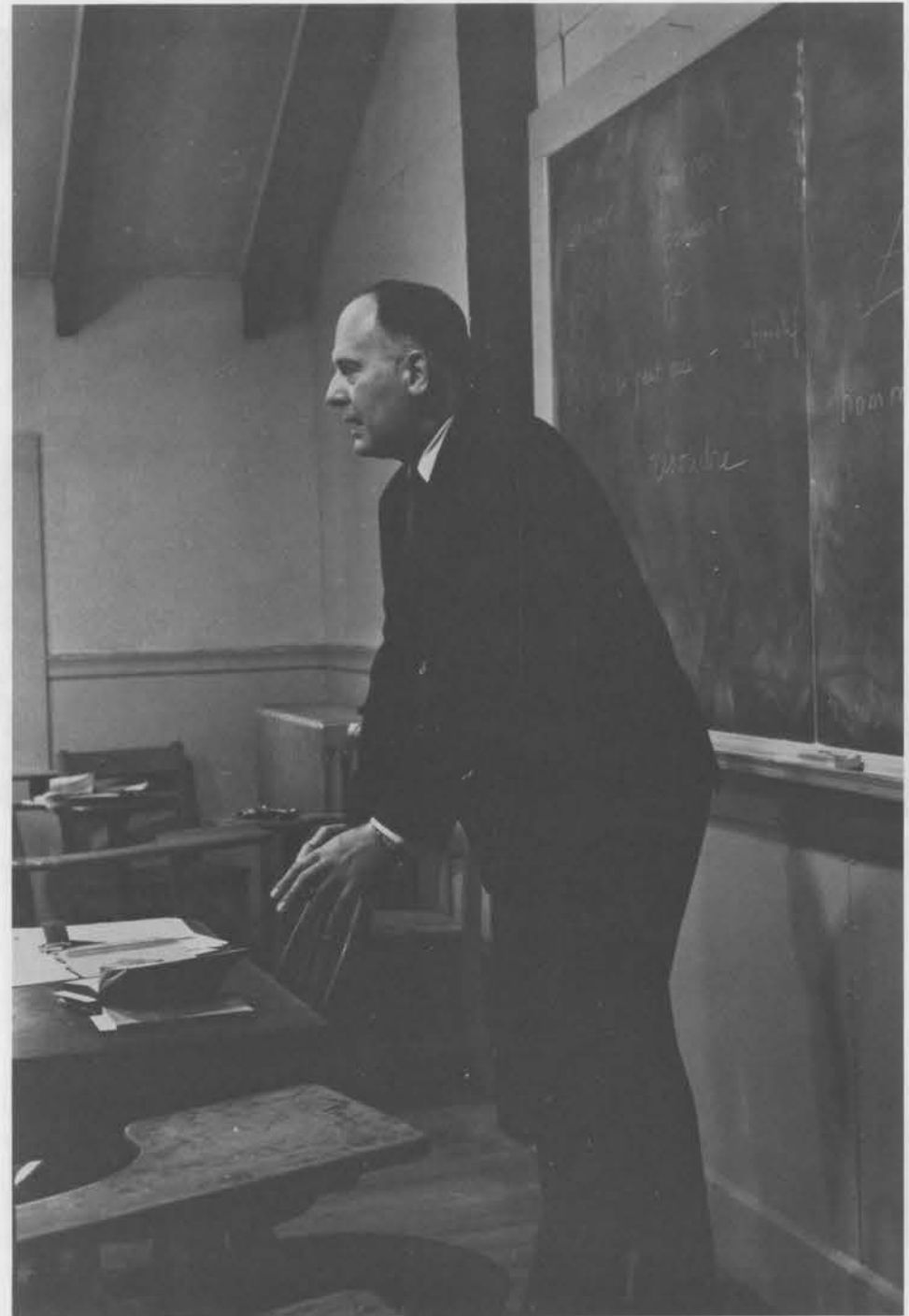


Remarkably, there still lingers in some quarters the noble if somewhat romantic conviction that Bennington's primary educational task is to help students tap and develop their own creative resources, to help them articulate a sensitive and discriminating voice of their own. Bennington's Literature Division continues to have a stake in this ideal.

Generally, one associates the idea of 'creative' work in literature with the writing of poetry or fiction. At Bennington, the contexts for 'creative writing' in the traditional sense are writing workshops, which are open to most students with two terms' work in literature, and, on a more advanced level, individual writing tutorials. As Bennington's educational philosophy allows and even encourages students to explore many different interests, one needn't major in literature—much less in creative writing—in order to participate in workshops and tutorials. And besides, at Bennington the field of creative discourse is not always exhausted by poetry and fiction: some instructors, in consonance with Norman O. Brown's maxim that 'the only proper response to poetry is poetry,' see the traditional distinction between 'creative' and 'critical' writing as, if not specious, then at least of limited value, for the critical or 'interpretive' project fulfills an important creative vocation in today's culture. Whatever one thinks of this as a principle of literary criticism, its application at Bennington has often proved exciting and pedagogically effective: if nothing else, the majority of literature students at Bennington are genuinely enthusiastic about their work.

Recent trends notwithstanding, Bennington is not intended primarily as a stepping stone to graduate school. While some literature students do continue on in school, many—especially, perhaps, the writers—do not; for them, as indeed for anyone studying literature at Bennington, the chief merits of the division lie not in the breadth of its program—for here there are gaps—but in its instructors. It was my own good fortune to have had teachers at Bennington who, more than simply knowledgeable and generous with their time (one expects this of one's teachers), were possessed of wisdom and enthusiasm and devotion for literature that I can honestly say contributed greatly to my understanding of myself and of the world. At its best, literature at Bennington is more than a study; it is a calling.

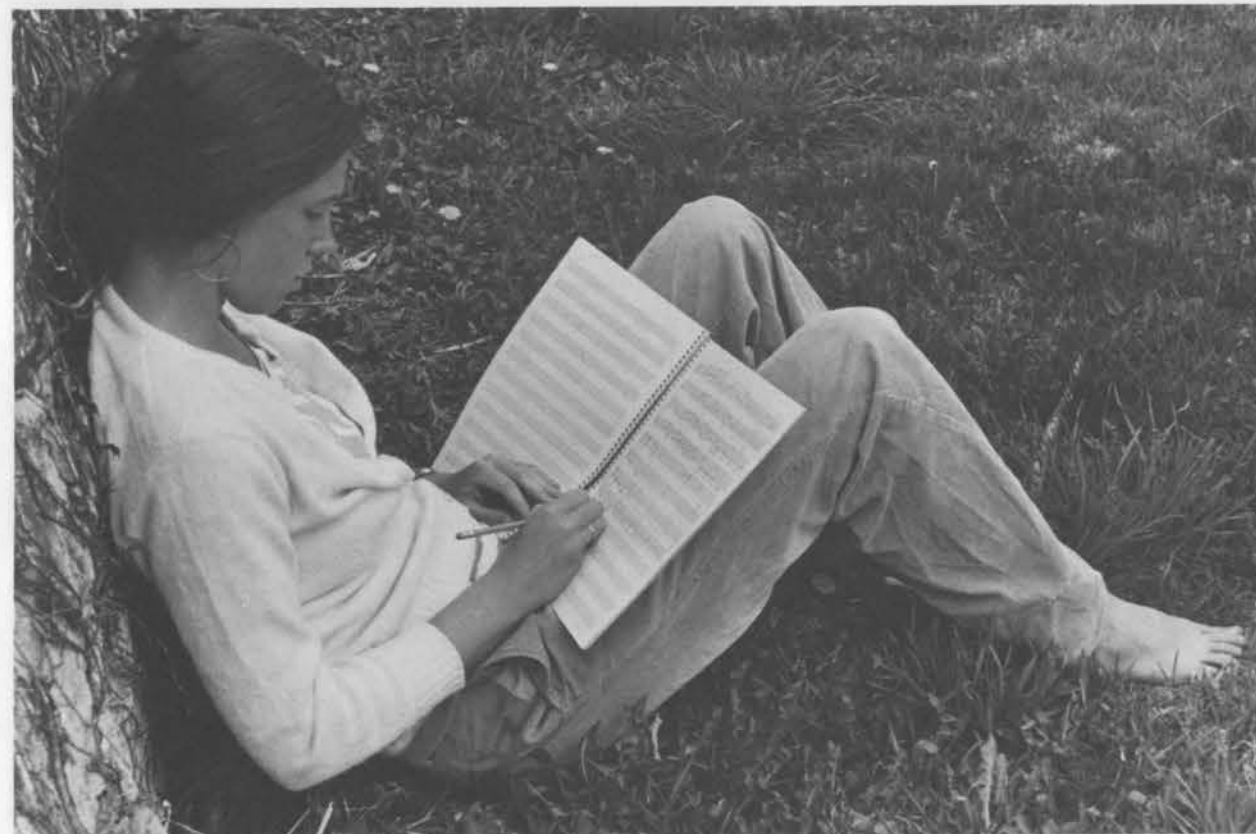
Roger Kimball





Music at Bennington is a unique experience. Mastery of the art and craft of music is of utmost importance, but there is special emphasis on rediscovering what music is. Composition is basic to studying music here because it is felt that through understanding the process of how music is created and preserved one can better understand music as a performer. This does not mean that composition is performance oriented; it clearly is not. Bennington has shown me that music is composition; whether writing an original piece or reviving what someone put down on paper 200 years ago. There is an attempt to bring music off the page and into the air—music is not notes on a staff, it is vibrations in the air.

Stephen Smith

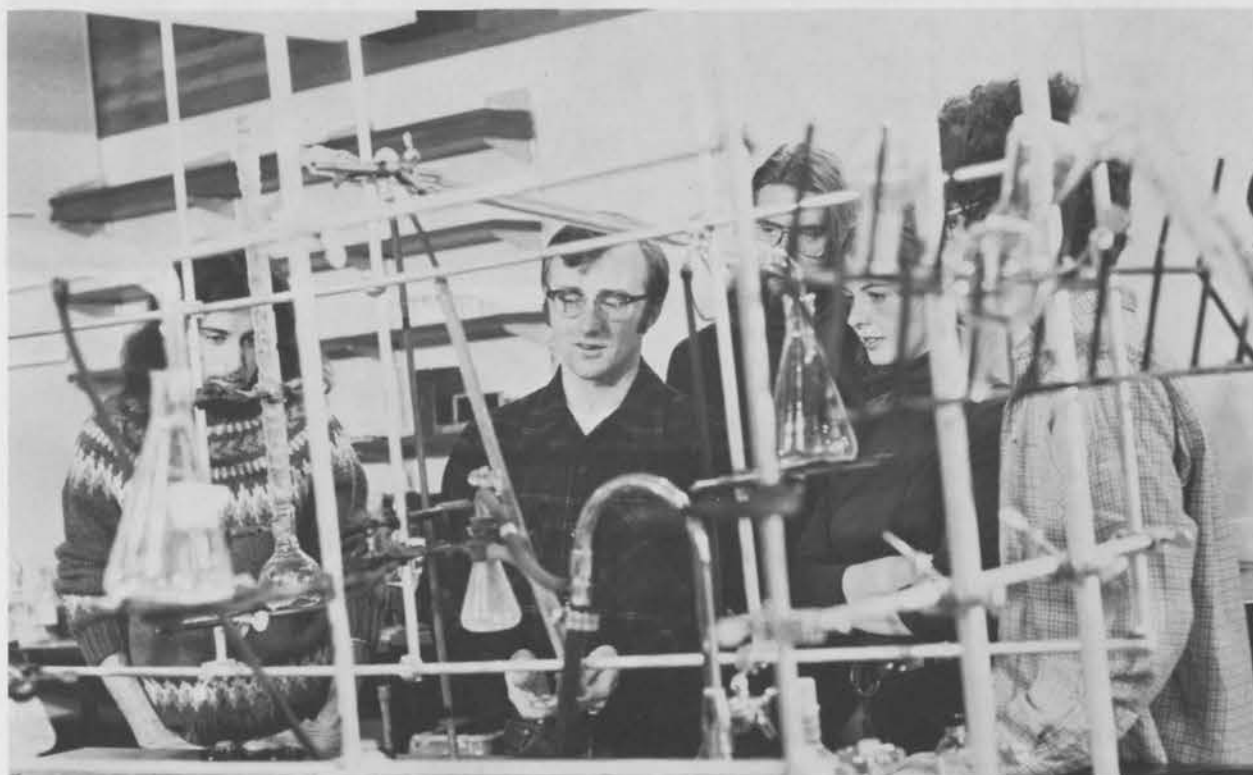


To be an active music major is to be in another world at Bennington. Jennings, the music building, sits mysteriously grey up on the hill, overlooking the campus and the mountains beyond. The campus itself is called "the other side" up there.

The teachers in the division are highly qualified in their field, whether performance or composition. More importantly, they are all professional musicians, actively involved in music outside the college. Music is not a study for them, they are not dry academicians. Perhaps in their professional involvement lies the most powerful element of education which exists in the music division—the love of music which each of them feels and spreads to his students. I never cease to be amazed by the power of their exuberance.

Tina Davidson

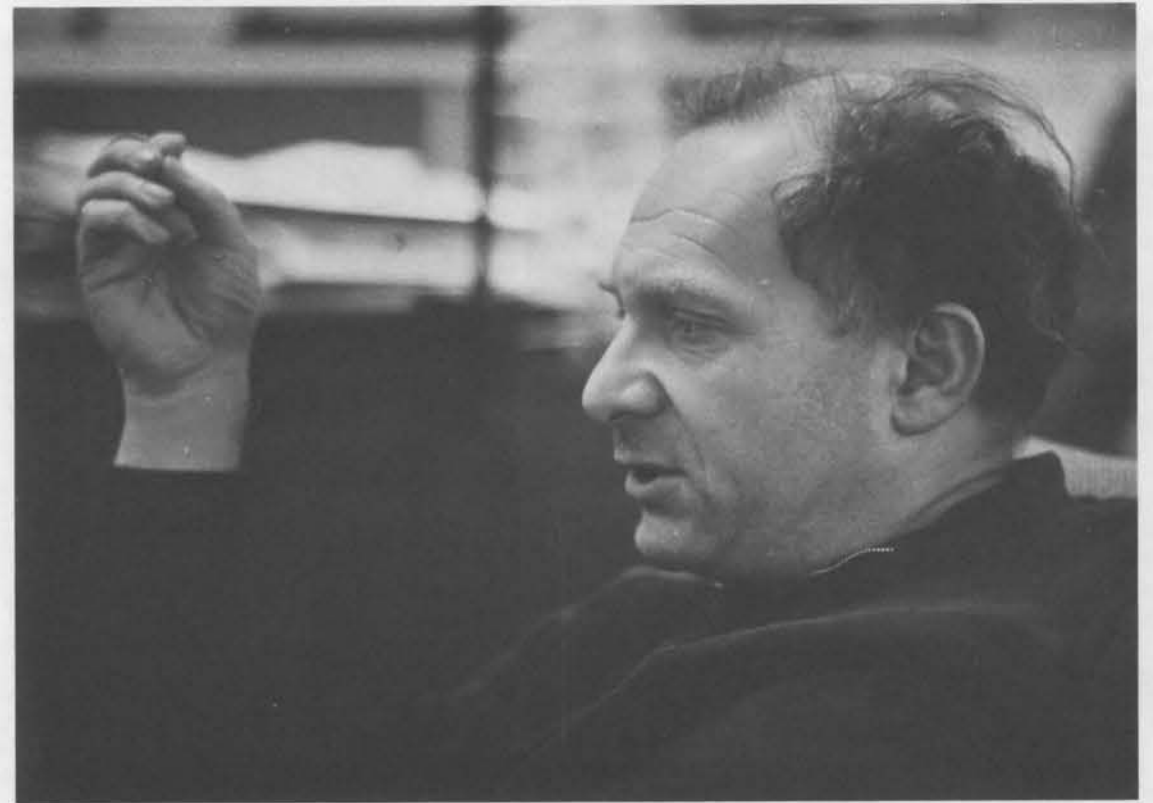
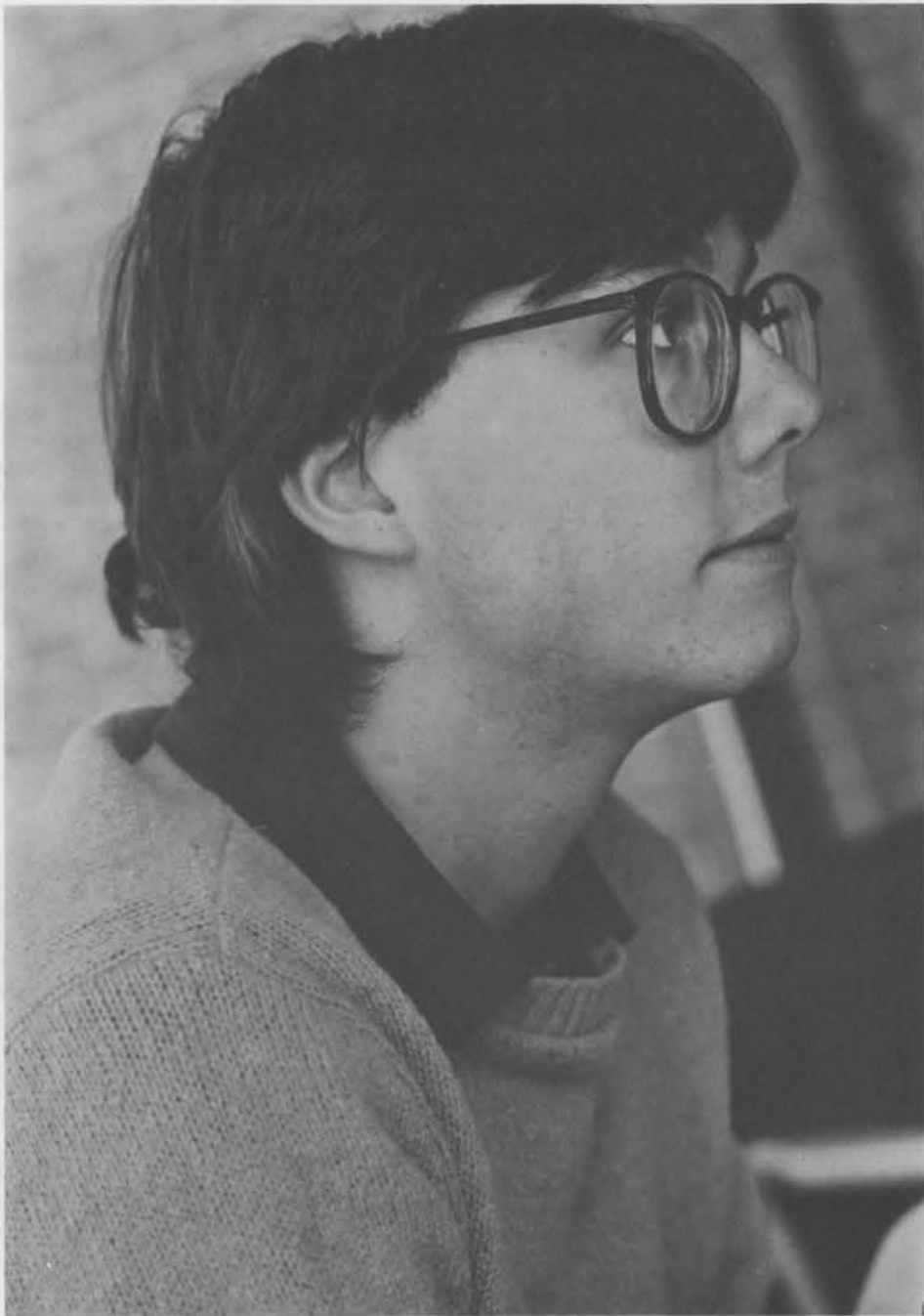




Here is information about the science department. It is one of the more together divisions at Bennington. There is a notable lack of laboratory equipment, especially in biology. This may be mitigated if one can get NRT jobs in labs. The teachers are generally less pompous and more accessible than those in other divisions. One can get a high degree of personal attention which helps a lot and is something not available in bigger schools. People who do well here can and do get into graduate and medical schools. It is housed in a nice structure.

Here is my subjective impression. This is a luscious place to study science. There are a few boring professors, but these can usually be avoided.

Hardy Kornfeld



Anywhere else the sundry parts of Bennington's Social Science Division would remain discrete. Philosophy and psychology would be separate and unaffiliated, perhaps not even on speaking terms. But here we have no choice; we must stick together for simple survival, and the result is an amalgam of differences. The Social Science Division is a joint stock company plagued by internecine wars and the social scientist's usual—and often vehement—love of the political limelight. The historians, philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and economists constitute a unit, and they must act together with the other divisions, as though they were really one. But this is an

impossible dream and an impossible plan. They can do nothing together, except to dominate college politics—though I doubt it could be fairly claimed that they know no more of what's going on than anyone else, but it is somehow the social scientist's job to assume these responsibilities—and try with all the rest to gain "positions," jockeying like so many racers for the best start. But for all the differences, and the difficulties involved in trying to make each of the parts viable and keep the whole as a good front at least, the division is strong, and each field a responsible stab at humanistic study.

Michael Connolly

The thing that sets Bennington apart as a place to study art is that in this liberal arts college you can pursue art with virtually all the seriousness and intensity of an art institute and still take literature classes, biology labs, and study music. It's almost like having your cake and eating it too. The art faculty here is, in my humble opinion, outstanding. Most of them are actively involved in the art world as painters, printmakers, critics, sculptors, architects, etc. They are working artists immersed in what's being done today. You see their work in SoHo or reviewed in *Artforum* and you can't help but have confidence in them. These people are downright inspiring.

The Art Division demands of its students, and particularly its majors, a dedication and commitment. You are taken very seriously here, and consequently a good deal is expected of you. There is a lot of talk about momentum and energy—you can't really survive in this division without them. Talent helps, naturally, but the work of most successful students shows struggle. It's healthy struggle, though. Students are pushing their work to the point where they are satisfied for a moment, and then pushing on. For me the struggle is finding something that is my own, something no one has ever done before.

Amy Sawelson



Photography at Bennington is very much alive and growing despite its restrictions. We have only one photographer on the faculty and our darkroom facilities might be considered limited by some, but the work turned out is bountiful and of a calibre that I feel is excellent.

Technique in black and white photography can be carried to the highest quality, and experimentation with the medium is blossoming. We don't have any color facility and rarely work with it, but that doesn't mean the study is totally closed to interested students. In fact, the direction of photography here is very open to anyone's ideas—remarkably so for having only one faculty member.

As a discipline within the Art Division, I see photography constantly changing for the better with serious potential for continued growth. I am eminently pleased with what's happening here in photography under the direction of one of the most dedicated educators I've ever met.

Jonathan Garhart







# in general

I transferred to Bennington from a large university hoping to escape mediocrity. Well, I escaped. Of all the adjectives used to describe this place, "mediocre" usually isn't one of them. I wanted to be surrounded by musicians and artists and people sincerely interested in their work, and the great thing about Bennington is that students are excited about what they're doing.

There are times—for instance, when I'm standing out on Commons lawn alone at night and the stars are out and it's so beautiful I could die—when this sort of self-indulgence becomes isolating. It's then I almost wish I was back at old State U. rotting away in the warmth of mediocrity. But most of the time I'm glad I'm here.

Jan Cherubin

"Only at Bennington" seems to be a popular expression here. I've heard it used in both the positive and negative sense, but mostly in recognition of the fact that there's a world here which, at least to us, seems to exist nowhere else. Bennington is small, and although you have to get away occasionally (to indulge in a crowd of completely unfamiliar faces), it is this smallness and the very personal manner that comes with it that I love. You can find a crowd almost anywhere, but this group of people can be found only here.

Beatrice Dohrn





I've been a Bennington student for half a term after spending two years at Connecticut College and one term at Northwestern. This hardly makes me an authority on campus life in America, but it does enable me to make comparisons between Bennington and other schools I've been to.

I have been truly impressed with the eager and enthusiastic attitude that students here have about their work, the close faculty-student relationships and the dedication and seriousness everyone brings to learning here, but the social scene is a wreck.

I think there's a real need for people here to enjoy themselves more. For example, the first warm Friday afternoon of the term I was really surprised that Commons lawn wasn't filled with people sitting around chucking Frisbees, drinking beers, soaking up the rays and listening to tunes. We're aching for more parties, better parties at least. I only think that working is no substitute for living.

Dan Cohen



High school lettermen, be advised. There are a good number of jocks here, but they are decidedly second-rate. Plenty of joggers. Throughout the spring term, there are regular softball games (none too competitive), and in the fall you will often find a soccer game in progress, accompanied by abundant beers. Now and then Bennington puts together an all-star eleven to compete with local high school talent (with little success), but otherwise there are no inter-school sports. Tennis courts exist on this erratically equipped campus, and you may find some hot mixed doubles competition with a few exciting foot faults. Poker games are many, and you'll have no trouble locating action for the Triple Crown races. Green Mountain Racetrack (flats and trotters) is a twenty minute breeze down Route 7, though local students of form will tell you the oval isn't kosher.

Michael Pollan





Because This Place is so small and We all live here, we cannot avoid seeing each other in all sorts of what would be considered elsewhere "private moments." We see each other eating, and dealing with the dining hall (which is another thing entirely), we see each other drunk, depressed, overjoyed, etc., etc. . . . It's very hard to be here for a while and not become known. Bennington is an excellent place to come for your allotted fifteen minutes of lifetime fame.

Tamio Spiegel



If you've heard that Bennington is an unfriendly place, essentially you've heard right. Don't be deceived. But don't be discouraged, either. So what if it's an "unfriendly" place? You don't have to be unfriendly, and even people in unfriendly places love friendly people. Don't expect to find a Just-One-Big-Happy-Family community. If you want to discover a community here, you just have to be one. That's the way Bennington is.

Beachy Stark

I resent the lack of privacy on campus. There is no place you can go—your own room included—where you can avoid a minimal level of noise. People noise. It's got to be voices, machines, music and such wherever you go. I find myself putting down my reading just to enjoy the quiet on those rare occasions when it surfaces.

Tamio Spiegel



Spontaneous social contact is difficult at Bennington. A student must quickly adapt himself to the college's most singular trauma: that of scanning, with all due indifference, the great grey sea of tables in the dining hall to find one whose numbers are well enough known to be joined for dinner. It's preferable, however, to do all of this without being seen, much less noticed. Which is not to say Bennington students don't crave companionship. They do. But they seem convinced that pursuing it is the only illegitimate way of getting it. You're supposed to be stumbled upon. Or, better yet, sought after, hopefully by someone your obvious social superior. What the people cowering in the corners waiting for social talent scouts don't realize is that sometimes you have to do things for yourself. Be brave. Take a risk. Drop your cafeteria tray on purpose.

Beachy Stark



If we begin with the assumption that no freshman is ever truly happy, then Bennington is, for me, bliss. The faculty is excellent. The setting, housing and food are all luxurious. The work load is demanding, but not impossible. I can't tell you whether Bennington College is good for you or not, but it suits me fine.

John Savlov





Obviously, if you're husband-hunting this isn't the place to do it. Being a woman in a woman-centered college can be a very positive experience. You learn to respect women here, and at the same time you learn to respect yourself as a woman.

a student









I find that the country setting here generates an energy that would be hard to duplicate elsewhere. One frequently hears that Bennington shelters its students from the "real world." At this point, it is difficult to say whether the unreal quality results from the campus' physical isolation or stems from something inherent in college life. I prefer to think that there's just something about attending college that sets one apart, temporarily, from the "real world." I doubt that Bennington is less attuned to that "real world" than any other institution. I'm sold on the place.

Lisa Schilit

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