
Bennington College Among Thirteen Small Liberal Arts Colleges to Receive \$3.275 Million to Tackle Student Mental Health

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First phase planning and capacity grant designed as a precursor to a total of \$8.5 million toward students' well-being.

New York, NY—To address what the [U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy](#) recognizes as “[the defining public health crisis of our time](#),” thirteen colleges have received \$3.275 million in funding from The Endeavor Foundation for the first phase of “Enhancing Student Learning and Experience through Campus Wellness, Student Wellbeing, and Mental Health Initiatives.” The multi-year collaborative project seeks both to respond to pressing needs and to integrate attention to mental health, wellbeing, and wellness throughout student learning.

“Student mental health issues represent an urgent challenge. These issues affect students in ways that prevent them from full participation in campus life and rob them of the precious sense of well-being which should be theirs. We hope that the Colleges’ work will help them transform their communities as well as inspire other institutions of higher learning to address challenges collectively,” said Julie Kidd, President of The Endeavor Foundation.

Bennington College is one of the thirteen colleges to receive funding, which it will use to bolster its mental health services and to participate in collaborative projects with other schools.

“We know that students everywhere are struggling, and we have an urgent responsibility to take action,” said Laura Walker, President of Bennington College. “The Endeavor Foundation’s generous support and this energetic collaboration offer an exciting opportunity to ask how we can employ our strengths as small, nimble colleges to address pressing mental health needs. Here at Bennington, our ambitious aim is to produce a model for change that reshapes mental health for our students and our community.”

In addition to Bennington College, twelve other colleges are part of the consortium—including Antioch College, in Yellow Springs, OH; Blackburn College in Carlinville, IL; College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, ME; Northland College in Ashland, WI; Prescott College in Prescott, AZ; Randolph College in Lynchburg, VA; St. John’s College, Annapolis in Annapolis, MD; St. John’s College, Santa Fe in Santa Fe, NM; Sterling College in Craftsbury Common, VT; Unity Environmental University in New Gloucester, ME; Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC; and Wells College in Aurora, NY—have been convened as a group by The Endeavor Foundation since 2016.

Ashley Kidd, Vice President and Director of Programs at Endeavor, said that the original idea in bringing the colleges together was “to work together to raise the visibility of smaller liberal arts colleges by drawing attention to the strength of their student-centered approaches and to the deep, transformative learning that takes place on their campuses.” In recent years, Kidd said, the focus for the colleges in the group, dubbed the “Endeavor Lab Colleges,” evolved into discussion about the many challenges facing higher education and small colleges even more acutely and the decision to take on one of them collectively and collaboratively.

“A strong future for higher education in the United States lies in collaboration, not competition,” said Julie Kidd. “We are confident that we will see in this emerging project the benefits of collaboration as the ELCs work jointly to tackle the pressing problem of student mental health challenges. I salute their courage and dedication in doing so. Their courage is indeed a source of inspiration for our work at Endeavor.”

Through a study on mental health among students, conducted in 2021, Bennington College identified mental health as one of the college’s highest priorities for both students and the community. Bennington College convened seventeen colleges the following year, which led to a strategy to increase support for students, develop more well-being services, implement restorative justice practices, and explore changes to first-year programming. This research helped shape the work of the thirteen colleges with the Endeavor Foundation.

Phase I, which will unfold over two years, focuses on immediate capacity building at each of the institutions and the development of shared pilot projects within four thematic areas, including credit-bearing curricular initiatives related to mental health and well-being; explorations of purposeful life and work, including defining personal values and what it means to live a meaningful life; place-based experiential learning in non-traditional classroom spaces; and expanded services and supports for mental health and well-being, including community care, clinical and non-clinical interventions and approaches, peer counseling, and restorative justice.

Each participating institution has received \$100,000 this year and will receive \$75,000 next year for this institutional capacity building. The ELCs will also develop and implement a process for continued and deepening collaboration. The successful completion of phase I will provide access to \$5.225 million over three additional years during which the schools will join forces to advance the most exciting and promising initiatives in one or more of the thematic areas. Together, they will develop programs and models that can be shared across the collaboration and to other liberal arts institutions.

“In this time when the value of higher education and of liberal arts education is regularly called into question, this project will show the power, relevance, and ingenuity of the liberal arts,” said Isabel Roche, Executive Director for Special Programs in Higher Education at Endeavor. “The Colleges’ shared commitment to attending to student and community needs around mental health, well-being, and wellness in expanded and new ways will allow for a fuller and more dynamic realization of the liberal arts ambition of educating the whole student, through greater integration, examination, and care for the other forms of self.”

“Many colleges and universities are driven to prepare their students for a particular job or professional role,” said Lori Collins-Hall, the grant Project Director and Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Sterling College. “Given the mental health crisis we are witnessing among young people on our campuses, we are united in our aim to equip students with the curiosity, creativity, interpersonal communication skills, resilience, and capacity for critical thought and self-efficacy that are essential for successful careers, meaningful lives, and engaged citizenship in today's world.”

About Bennington College

Bennington College is a liberal arts college in southwestern Vermont that has distinguished itself as a vanguard institution within American higher education. It was the first to include the visual and performing arts in a liberal arts education. It is the only college to require that its students spend a term—every year—at work in the world. Bennington students work intensively with faculty to forge individual educational paths around their driving questions and interests.

Rooted in an abiding faith in the talent, imagination, and responsibility of the individual, Bennington invites students to pursue and shape their own intellectual inquiries and, in doing so, to discover the profound interconnection of things. Learn more at bennington.edu.

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