

Bennington College.

I hesitate to speak on this subject because I shall have to use the first personal pronoun quite frequently. + The idea of a college in Bennington originated with me, and for some time I was a voice crying in the wilderness, suspected of having taken leave of my senses. + I hope that I shall not give the impression this evening of being vain and conceited. The Lord knows that I am conscious of my physical, mental and spiritual limitations.

In January 1918 I went to France as a Y.M.C.A. secretary. In France I contracted a streptococcus infection of the throat which resulted in abscesses of the middle ear. I spent many weeks in a hospital in Nice: was reduced to skin and bones, and finally invalided home. I mention this in passing. Had I not gone to France I never would have gone to Bennington.

Late in the summer of 1919 I was visiting friends in Manchester Vermont. On a Saturday morning the telephone rang, and someone asked me if I would preach on the following morning in the Old First Church of Bennington, 22 miles South of Manchester. I did. At the close of the service the officers of the church asked me if I would consider a call to the pastorate of the church. To make a long story short, I finally agreed to supply the pulpit for two years, hoping that two years of mountain air and country life would restore my health. I remained 25 years. Why? Because during those first two years an idea came to me, - the idea of a college for women in Bennington.

Why another college for women in New England? Because each year more than 2,000 girls who had passed their College Board examinations were denied admission to the standard women's colleges from lack of room and facilities. One of the phenomena following the First World War was the passion for higher education both among men and women. The existing men's colleges could expand more easily than the women's colleges. There are more of

them, backed by powerful alumni bodies and by large endowments. Education until recently has been monopolized by men.

I perceived that another woman's college in New England was inevitable; and that if I could rouse the people of Bennington the college could be established in Bennington, with all the intellectual, social and economic advantages that would accrue therefrom to the community.

But why Bennington?

(a) Because of its rich historic background. Founded as a result of the bitter religious controversy born of the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and Whitefield, ~~which~~ a controversy which rocked New England in the early part of the 18th century. The founders of Bennington and its First Church were Separates who abandoned their homes in Massachusetts and Connecticut to escape persecution -

Bennington played a great part in the Revolutionary War. The Green Mountain Boys. Capture of Fort Ticonderoga. Battle of Bennington, leading to the victory of Saratoga. Saratoga one of the decisive battles of history. It brought the recognition of the 13 Colonies by France; and powerful military aid. Region around Bennington dotted with markers and monuments.

(b) Because of the unusual beauty of the region. Green Mountains, Taconic Range. Majestic valleys. A great country for out-door sports.

(c) Because of its ~~excellent~~ healthful climate in summer and winter. According to the U. S. weather bureau the average annual temperature of Bennington is 10 degrees colder than either Boston or New York. What that means in summer and winter.

(d) Because of its strategic position with reference to centers of population, and educational institutions. New York, Montreal, Boston.

These thoughts engaged my mind for two years. The idea was so preposterous that I confided only in Mrs. Booth, and she was pledged to secrecy.

In the Spring of 1923 I attended the annual meeting of the Vermont Congregational Conference held in Burlington, Vt. During the last session of the conference I was seated in a back pew. President Paul D. Moody

of Middlebury College was seated on the front pew. Two voices began to argue in my soul. First voice, - "Mention this idea to Moody." Second voice, "Don't! he'll put you down for a fool." + The argument was debated hotly between the two voices all through that session of the conference. The first voice won. The benediction had scarcely been pronounced before I rushed up to Dr. Moody and said: "How would you like to see a woman's college established at Bennington?" He gave me a long look and then answered: "You could not mention a subject that would interest me more." Then he went on: "We can't talk now because I must run to catch a train back to Middlebury. But one of these days I'll call on you in Bennington, and then we shall talk." Two days later he sent me a telegram: "Shall be at your house tomorrow at 2 p.m." He came. We spent the afternoon tramping over the town looking over the historical sites. I showed him the campus I had picked out. When he saw the William Lloyd Garrison memorial he remarked: "I'd give \$50,000 if this marker could stand on the Middlebury campus, because of Garrison's significance ^{the struggle for} to human freedom." He promised to support the project if it was ever launched.

This was in May 1923. But still I was afraid to take the plunge. In September of that year I called on a wealthy lady from Troy who summered in Bennington, and asked her if she would invite twelve ladies, (I gave her the names), to her house to hear a statement about a plan I had in mind. She agreed. The twelve ladies came together and I made my statement. It fell flat. Incredulity was stamped on every face but one. Mrs. James C. Colgate arose and remarked that the plan for a woman's college in Bennington had great possibilities, that she approved it and would support it. She turned the tide, being a woman of great wealth and influence. The other ladies made haste to climb on the band wagon. I pulled out of my pocket a prepared statement endorsing the plan. All 12 signed it.

Armed with this statement I requested Mr. + Mrs. Colgate to call a meeting at their mansion of 75 prominent members of the community.

That meeting was addressed by President Moody, President Neilson of Smith College, and myself. Pres. Moody stressed the need of further facilities for the education of women. I stressed Bennington as an ideal locality for a college. But Pres. Neilson had the real surprise up his sleeve. He affirmed that the real need was not for another college for women, but a different kind of college for women planned to meet their needs as women. He pointed out that women had had to fight long and hard for the privilege and right to enjoy higher education: that the ancient superstition had to be dissipated, to wit, that women are inferior intellectually and have no capacity for higher education. To prove the contrary they had taken over bodily the curricula of the men's colleges and striven successfully to surpass the men in scholarship. In the beginning colleges in the Old and New World were interested primarily in preparing men for the priesthood and the ministry. An education designed for priests was not necessarily the best kind of education for a woman. He insisted that the hour had struck for a thoroughgoing investigation of the whole subject, untrammelled by precedent, tradition and vested interests. He pointed out that the old line colleges were handicapped by self-perpetuating ^{boards} Trustees elected for life, and by alumnae associations wedded to the past. If Bennington College could pioneer and blaze a new path in the field of education it would render a very great service to the womanhood of America.

There and then a committee of 21 was created. At the first meeting I was elected chairman. The 21 were broken down into four committees, — Curriculum, Statistics, Finance, Publicity. All four committees went to work with great enthusiasm. I kept in touch with all four and coordinated their work. Three months later a plenary meeting of the four committees was held in Bennington. All four reported progress. A new committee was formed, the New York Committee, with Mrs. Hall Park McCullough as chairman. This committee gradually developed into a powerful

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group, numbering some of the outstanding men and women in New York City interested in education.

I shall pass over the activities of the next few months. I travelled thousands of miles visiting the principal colleges and universities of the East as far West as Chicago, consulting college presidents, leaders in education, officers of ~~the~~ educational foundations, such as the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, The Harkness Foundation, and writing innumerable letters. The Committee of 21 financed me.

In April 1924 the New York Committee arranged for a meeting of educators which was held at the Colony Club in New York City. Invitations were sent to the heads of preparatory schools, colleges and universities East of the Mississippi. The response was amazing. The great ball room of the Colony Club was packed to capacity. The assembly was addressed by Pres. Neilson of Smith College; Dr. William H. Kilpatrick, Professor of the Philosophy of education at Teacher's College, Columbia University, and myself. Pres. Neilson and Dr. Kilpatrick stressed the need for a new departure in the education of women. (The meeting passed resolutions endorsing the project.) The meeting passed resolutions endorsing the project, which by this time had acquired considerable momentum. Not all the criticism was friendly.

Our next move was to get a charter from the Vermont Legislature. Here we struck a snag. For a while it looked as if the college would have to be established outside the boundaries of Vermont. Some 80 years ago Vermonters became alarmed at the successful efforts of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in organizing parochial and secondary schools in Vermont. There was reason to suspect that the hierarchy intended to cap their educational system with a college, possibly a university in Burlington, Vermont. In those days the A.P.A. was at the zenith of its power. The Vermont Legislature was prevailed upon to write a law on its statute books forbidding the

establishment in the future of any institution not controlled by the state. That such a fool-law could be passed explains why Vermont with monotonous regularity goes Republican year in and year out. Since our college was not to be controlled by the state we seemed to have reached the end of the road. ~~But~~ State politicians advised us that it was not wise to petition the Legislature to abrogate the law in question.

Mr. Sargent, who served as Attorney General for a season in the Coolidge administration, had retired from public office and returned to his private practice of law in Ludlow, Vt. He became interested in our problem, but saw no way out. He formed the practice of submitting the problem to any Vermont lawyer who dropped into his office, but with no results. + One day a lawyer walked in to Sargent's office who was considered to be a fool and a ner-do-well. Mr. Sargent in a bantering mood stated the question. He certainly did not expect to gain light and wisdom from such a source. The fool lawyer, thought a moment, and then said: "That is easy. Get the Legislature to tack on an amendment to the law, such as this. "No institution in Vermont shall be

'No institution of higher education shall be established in Vermont which is not to be under the control of the State, unless in the judgment of the Secretary of State the establishment of such an institution shall be deemed to be in the public interest.'"

Mr. Sargent looked up in astonishment, banged the desk with his fist and shouted: "You blankety, blank fool! you've got it!"

In due time the amendment was introduced and passed by the Legislature. We petitioned the Secretary of State for a charter. He decided that it was for the public good to establish Bennington College and granted us a charter. Now listen to this! The Roman Catholic Hierarchy got a charter to establish their college in Burlington six weeks before we got ours!

Having obtained a charter, we organized a temporary board of 15 trustees consisting entirely of Benningtonians, with the understanding that if and when the College was established the temporary board would be replaced by a permanent board, representing the educational centers, such as New York, Boston, Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia, etc.

I may say that during the nine years required to establish the College, (The first Freshman Class was admitted in September 1932), the temporary board of trustees contributed more than \$150,000 for promotional work. A fully staffed office was maintained in New York, with ^{an} experienced secretariat. A very large part of this huge sum was contributed by the Macaulough family, one of the wealthiest families in Vermont. + Let me tell you how \$10,000 of this money was spent. We felt that an authoritative survey of woman's education should be made. We retained Miss Amy Kelly of the Brynmar School of Baltimore to make the survey, a former professor at Wellesley. She travelled as far West as California, visiting the most important centers of education. She went to England, France, Switzerland - Her report was published in book form. It was sent all over this country. It resulted in a flood of criticism, some friendly, some not so friendly.

Several educators of national note stated during those long nine years of effort and struggle that even if Bennington College should never come into existence the attempt would fully justify itself because it had compelled the women's college to take an account of stock, and rebuild their curricula. Compare the catalogues of 25 years ago with the programs of today and you will soon be conscious of the changes and advances that have been made.

Soon after the temporary board of trustees was organized the question of raising money came up. It was realized that New York and Boston could not be solicited to give a few millions until Vermont had pledged a substantial sum. Members of the Board prepared a master list of possible ~~de~~ Vermont donors. This list was divided into 15 parts. Each of the 15 trustees was to canvass one of the 15 lists. + A meeting of the Board was called. And then a discouraging situation arose. They all with one accord began to make excuses. They turned on me saying: "You got us into this. It's up to you to solicit subscription."

So they voted to raise two and a half million dollars, of which Vermont was to contribute \$500,000. All pledges were to be conditional on raising the full amount. A pledge form was printed and I was turned loose. In just about one year Vermonters pledged \$672,000.

In addition we obtained a 400 acre campus, with a 40 room granite mansion, (now the Conservatory of Music), and extensive farm buildings. The owner was a widow, now deceased, a member of my church. She also contributed \$100,000 in cash, part of that \$672,000 just mentioned

There isn't time to tell the story of how we got a president. We had 70 names on the list. All 70 turned us down, for which I do not blame them, since they all held assured positions in the educational world. Finally, when we were ready to ~~through~~^{throw} up the sponge, we ran across a courageous and adventurous soul ready to risk his future for an idea, - Robert Dvorc Leigh, Professor of Government in Williams College, a very happy choice. He did a magnificent job both in organizing the College and shaping the curriculum. He served for ten years, and was succeeded three years ago by Dr. Lewis Webster Jones.

With the election of Dr. Leigh I ceased to be the executive officer of the project. From then on Dr. Leigh was the leader, and shaped all policies. I continued however as Secretary of the Corporation.

A word about campus and buildings. One of the few colleges in the country to be built as a unit. Before the first spadefull of dirt was turned for the first building the location of each and every building was determined on the blue prints. It is built as a typical New England village. Village green with elms. Buildings on three sides of the village green - Commons - hotel. Two streets parallel to the village green, with student houses on either side of the street. Farm buildings adapted to college uses - The great barn.

And now a word about the intellectual structure of the College.

Admissions.

Bemington is among the institutions which have pioneered in liberalizing the regulations governing college admissions. It has never depended upon the results of a standard set of written examinations, but has sought more varied and more inclusive data, among which academic standing is still central. The College is also concerned in maintaining a representative student population. It encourages application from any student who will actually gain from the type of education Bemington has to offer; it tries to locate such students and to discover the real qualifications of applicants as persons and their real aptitudes as scholars - One of the highest paid officers of the college is the Director of Admissions, - Mrs. Mary Garrett.

Requirements.

The applicant must first show promise of ability to do college work. The minimum requirement is successful completion of a secondary school education, usually with graduation; but no particular array of subjects or number of units is demanded. Importance is attached to the seriousness of the girl's intention to carry through a college education, and assurance is sought that this intention is genuine and well founded, and that her choice of Bemington College is a considered one -

The College enrolls a total of about 300 students, approximately 100 of whom are admitted each year. The College graduates approximately 60 students each year. The mortality ~~is~~ between the Freshman and Senior year is therefore 40%. College education is not everybody's business.

So far the College has been able to pick and choose its student body. One out of every three applicants is admitted.

The College has no endowment. The General Education Board advised us not to establish another charitable educational institution, on the ground that this country can pay for what it wants. The students pay the entire cost of maintaining the institution. Each student

pays to the College \$1,675 per year: \$1,000 for tuition, and \$675 for room, board, laboratory ~~fee~~ and infirmary fees. Multiply \$1,675 by 300 and you will discover that the College has an income of over half a million per annum. (28)

The faculty consists of 60 teachers, one teacher for every five students. A teacher receives an adequate salary. Some professors receive as much as \$6,500 per year. That means that the college can afford the best available teachers. The Counsellor and Tutorial system of education requires a large faculty, and competent instructors.

The Library consists of over 25,000 volumes, increased annually by approximately 1,500 volumes. The Carnegie Foundation has contributed, so far \$50,000 for new books. In addition to periodicals, the collection consists almost entirely of individual titles, chosen to meet the needs of a modern liberal arts college. There is not a single worthless book on the shelves. When a book is discovered to be worthless it is thrown out.

The government of the student body is controlled by the students themselves through six contributing agencies, to wit, - the House Council, the Central Committee, the Recreation Council, the Health Committee, the Student Educational Policies Committee, and the General Meetings Committee. A College Council, representative of these subsidiary bodies, is responsible for over-all organization and liaison. Notice the Educational Policies Committee - The students are encouraged to pass judgment on all ~~face face~~ phases of college experience. Their constructive criticisms are submitted to the Educational Policies ~~of~~ Committee of the faculty, and passed on to the corresponding committee of the trustees. An alumna sits on the board of trustees, representing the student body.

The board of trustees consists of 15 members. Each trustee is elected for a seven year term. At the expiration of his term he automatically drops off, and cannot be reelected until at least one year has elapsed. I served two terms, with an intermission of two years between terms. In my case the trustees voted to make an exception. I would not allow it, so as not to establish a precedent.

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The College Year is divided into three terms separated by vacations totalling six weeks. There are two four-month terms at the College, and an additional three-month term of non-resident work under the supervision of the College.

Here is the calendar for 1944 - 1945.

July 29, 1944 Commencement

August 24 Opening of Fall Term.

From October 19 to Oct. 24 (five days) Mid-Term Vacation.

October 25 - Classes resumed.

December 16. End of first term.

January 2, 1945 - Non-Resident term, ^{begins} ending March 31.

April 3 - Opening of Spring Term.

From May 29 to June 4, (five days) Mid-Term Vacation.

June 4 Classes Resumed.

July 28 1945 Commencement.

Plans for the non-resident term are worked out by each student with the advice of her counselor or tutor, under the general control of the Director of Non-Resident Work, who takes responsibility for the detailed arrangements and supervision of the work done away from College. Students work in factories, stores, government or social agencies, research laboratories, hospitals, libraries, studios. Or the time may be used for intensive academic work not available at Bennington. Most students return to their home communities but because of the war many are able to support themselves away from home. As they gain experience, students can find increasingly interesting and responsible work. In every case, an attempt is made to work out plans for each

individual student which best suit her needs at the time. (4)
Reports on non-resident work are made by the employer and by the student to the Director of Non-Resident Work. These reports form a part of the cumulative academic record on which the degree is awarded -

The non-resident term serves several important educational purposes. Students are enabled to relate themselves and their academic studies to the life of their communities, and to take their places as adults, living and working with people of many different backgrounds. The non-resident term gives a clear direction to college work by testing vocational interests and abilities early enough to confirm or revise them.

The student entering Pennington College spends her first two years in the Junior Division under the direction of a counselor, a member of the faculty. Many students enter college with a general curiosity and a desire to learn, but without any clearly defined plans for college work or for a vocation. Among the chief purposes of the work of the first two years are the discovery of the student's interests and abilities, and diagnosis of her educational needs.

The counselor's main function is to advise the student about all aspects of her work and to guide her in ~~the~~ developing an understanding of her general education. He helps her to arrange and balance her program; to review and evaluate her progress; to discover her capacities and limitations; to promote the best use of those capacities; to develop self-dependence and habits of directing her own work.

The counselor also receives frequent reports on the student's achievement from all her instructors, and interprets them to the student, especially in relation to her future program. Additional work may be prescribed by the counselor, perhaps in the form of an individual project, often in the form of further exploration of areas of knowledge not fully covered in her courses: sometimes

in the form of necessary drill on fundamental techniques. The counsellor takes responsibility for written work, giving consultation and criticism on both content and organization of all papers the student is called upon to write. In cases of unusual difficulty with written expression, the student may be advised to enter the course in remedial writing.

There are no required subjects at Bennington College. The student is absolutely free to determine, under guidance, which studies she will pursue -

Let me give you an example, - Marion Lambert - member of the first Freshman Class admitted to Bennington College when it opened in 1932 -

The time, ability and resources of the student for two years are devoted to Basic Studies. Each basic course deals with one of the major fields of human achievement. The primary purpose of the Basic Studies may be described as general education in distinction to specialization within a field.

Here is a partial list of the Basic Studies offered in the Junior Division.

- (1) Political Economy. (2) War and Peace. (3) The Commonwealth.
 - (4) Economy and Society. (5) Forms of Literature. (6) Personality and the Social Order. (7) The Language of Music. (8) Structure and Style in Dance. (9) Analysis of Visual Art. (10) The Western Tradition. (11) Literature and the Humanities. (12) Science in Culture. (13) Society and the Individual. (14) The Hebrew-Christian Tradition. (15) Human Nature and Character Structure.
 - (16) Main Developments in Western Music -
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Promotion from the Junior to the Senior Division does not depend on any system of marking the student's progress. No grades are given at Bennington College. The only criterion is the progress made and the effort ^{put forth} ~~made~~. Has the student worked hard and

intelligently, and what can she show for her two year effort? (e)

Descriptive reports are made by her instructors twice each semester, and the gist of these reports is given the student by her counselor. Once a year the student's whole record is summarised in a letter embodying the reports on her work with comments, criticism and suggestions for the modification of her educational and vocational plans.

First year students are invited without question to return for a second year if they have shown a reasonable capacity to benefit from college work, and if their progress in the transition from the directed study of school to the independent effort required in college is satisfactory. In the rare case of complete failure to live up to the standards of the College in either academic or social matters, the student is not permitted to return.

The important decision on promotion comes at the end of the second year, when the student applies for promotion from the Junior Division to the Senior Division if she feels ready for advanced work in a major. She prepares an application which includes a summary and appraisal of her educational experiences in the Junior Division, a statement of her choice of a major field, and her plan for further study. The preparation of this application serves an important educational function: the student is obliged to take stock of her accomplishment: to consider seriously whether she has the interest, ability and drive to undertake advanced college work, and to commit herself to a plan of study in a ~~new~~ major.

Promotion is granted or refused by the Junior Division Committee on the basis of the counselor's recommendation and the student's total record in College. The committee's investigations aim to discover whether the student gives promise of becoming eligible in two more years for the Bemington degree.

On entering the Senior Division the student is assigned to a tutor who is a member of the faculty in the field of her prospective major.

The tutor, like the Junior Division counsellor, supervises the student's entire program. Each major must be sufficiently restricted to make possible the attainment of real competence, and broad enough to constitute a legitimate emphasis within a liberal education. Though the major is the center of work during the last two years, Senior Division students are expected to pursue interests of a more general nature and to take work in other fields.

Here is a partial list of the majors offered to the Senior Division.

In Biology

- (1) General Botany. (2) General Zoology. (3) Genetics and Evolution.
- (4) Bacteriology. (5) Foods and Nutrition. (6) Fundamentals of Food Production. (7) Comparative Vertebrate Zoology. (8) Embryology
- (9) Cytology. (10) Immunology. (11) General Physiology. (12) Plant Physiology. (13) Human Physiology.

In Chemistry

- (1) General Chemistry. (2) Organic Chemistry. (3) Qualitative Analysis. (4) Quantitative Analysis. (5) Physical Chemistry
- (6) Biochemistry. ~~(7)~~

In Physics.

- (1) Elementary Physics. (2) Intermediate Physics. (3) Science of Musical Sound. (4) Color. (5) Atomic Physics.

Mathematics.

- (1) Introduction to Mathematical Analysis. (2) Mathematics Workshop. (3) Statistics.

Social Science

- (1) Clinical psychology. (2) Experimental Psychology. (3) Methods with Young Children. (4) Cultural Anthropology. (5) Sociology.

Political Economy and History

- 1 American History. (2) International Politics. (3) Medieval History
- (4) The Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation
- (5) Modern History. (6) Introduction to Chinese Civilization.

- (7) Russia and the Baltic States. (8) Economic Analysis and Policy. (9) History of Economic Thought. (10) Labor and Industry. (11) American Political Thought. (12) American Economic and Social Institutions.

Literature, Language and Philosophy

- (1) Remedial Writing. (2) Creative Writing. (3) Verse Form. (4) Form in the Novel. (5) Dramatic Form. (6) American Prose and Poetry. (7) Modern English Poetry. (8) Dante. (9) Donne and the 17th Century. (10) Blake and the 18th Century. (11) The 19th Century Novel. (12) Language as Symbolic Action. (13) Mediterranean Traditions in Literary Form.

Foreign Languages

- French, German, Spanish, Russian, Latin, Greek. (2) French Literature of the 17th Century. (3) French Thought in the 18th Century. (4) The Contemporary French Novel. (5) The Development of German Literature. (6) Goethe. (7) Rilke. (8) The Development of Spanish Literature. (9) The Development of Russian Literature.

Performing Arts

Drama

- (1) Technique of Acting. (2) Voice Techniques. (3) Dance Techniques. (4) Analysis of the Dramatic Medium. (5) Dramatic Form. (6) Drama Workshop. (7) Radio and Recording Techniques.

Dance

- (1) Techniques of Modern Dance. (2) Folk and Country Dancing. (3) Tap Dancing. (4) Dance Composition. (5) Rhythmic Training. (6) Rhythmic Notations and Percussion Accompaniment. (7) Dance Workshops. (8) Dance Seminar. (9) Comparative Vertebrate Zoology.

Music

- (1) Harmony and Counterpoint. (2) Composition. (3) Piano Techniques and Repertoire. (4) Orchestral Instruments. (5) Ensemble. (6) Orchestra. (7) Vocal Techniques and Repertoire. (8) Oratorio Singing. (9) Choral Singing. (10) Radio and Recording Techniques. (11) Music Workshop.

Visual Arts

- (1) Drawing. (2) Painting Studio. (3) Sculpture Studio.
(4) Ceramics and Pottery Studio. (5) Architecture Studio.
(6) Photography Studio. (7) Graphic Arts Studio. Wood-cutting,
typography, lithography, etching. (8) Fresco Painting. (9)
Pictorial Form. (10) Architectural Form. (11) Mechanical Drawing.
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Degree. Only one degree is given at Bemington College, B. A.
The degree is a certificate both of competence in a major
field and of a general education based on important elements
in Western civilization.

No final comprehensive examinations are given. The student's
whole accomplishment is considered in recommending her for the
degree. In most cases, some important piece of individual work has
been done, and its successful completion is part of the evidence of
the student's competence. The Bemington degree attests the
student's achievement and her readiness to continue her own
education.