

November 29, 1974

To: the Trustees

From: Amelia Rogers, chairman SEPC Re: Faculty Cuts

Two weeks ago the Faculty Educational Policy Committee held a Community Hearing to discuss criteria for faculty allocations and the elimination of $2\frac{1}{2}$ full time faculty positions. When the College expanded it was stipulated that the student:faculty ratio not exceed 9:1. It is now 8.6:1. From the FEPC invitation to the community hearing I quote, "though admirable educationally, in a period of hardship this ratio is no longer financially tenable. The FEPC has therefore, to assume the responsibility of recommending reduction in the size of the overall faculty by $2\frac{1}{2}$ full time positions."

Who is the FEPC assuming this responsibility from? No one really seems to know very much, including the FEPC. The whole tone of the hearing was very disturbing. From the community it demonstrated a definite lack of confidence in Bennington's administration. Educationally Bennington College can not afford to lose $2\frac{1}{2}$ faculty positions. At the hearing the SEPC proposed an addition of eight to the faculty, not an elimination of $2\frac{1}{2}$, to show that if any change in the faculty is to be made it should be expanded. But for some reason the administration seems to be adamant in the cutting of the $2\frac{1}{2}$ positions.

We realize of course, that money is not easy to come by and we must make every effort to cut back everywhere possible. However, the one place where cutting back would seriously damage Bennington is the faculty. We are building a very expensive Performing Arts building, and if money can come from somewhere for that, why can't it come from somewhere for the faculty? We voted a new division last Spring, the Black Music Division. The president assured us that we could afford to do this, but now all of a sudden we are told to find criteria for $2\frac{1}{2}$ cuts in the faculty. Where is the sense of responsibility in the administration for this decision? There seems to be none.

Because of the financial bind that we are in we must set our priorities. The most important thing about Bennington College is its faculty: the depths of study that a student can go into with a teacher, that happens at no other College in the same wonderful way that it happens at Bennington. Bennington College IS its faculty. Yes, it is wonderful to have a new Performing Arts building, science building, library, we need the space desperately, but once again, more important than anything else is the faculty. We feel that it is possible and absolutely necessary to come up with the money for the $2\frac{1}{2}$ full time positions that the administration feels must be cut.

At the community hearing we never got to discuss criteria. There were too many questions to ask along the "Why are we doing this?" line. At the end of the meeting Vivian Fine declared a sense of the meeting: "The sense of this meeting is that we do not wish to become involved in decisions about the re-allocation or the cutting back of faculty positions. We want to refer these problems back to the FEPC and to the Trustees for further study of alternative solutions." The entire community voted in agreement with the exception of one, the FEPC voted in favor with two abstentions.

The decision about the 2½ positions is to be made before the end of the term, less than 3 weeks away. We are circulating petitions which read "We the undersigned feel that any cuts from the faculty would make it impossible for Bennington College to maintain its standards of education." We will get results to you as soon as we have them. We are also working on setting up a committee to review the budget penny for penny and to hear suggestions for raising money or for suggestions as to where we could cut back more than we already have. We would like to help, but how much we can do at this point, before the end of term, I don't know. We would like you, in your responsibility as Trustees of this College to recognize the importance of this decision, and we want you to know how strongly we feel that it is imperative to keep the faculty at least the size that it is now. We must set our priorities and live up to them. No, it won't be easy to find the money, but we're going to have to do it somehow.

Thankyou very much,

Amelia Rogers

Amelia Rogers, chairman SEPC