

To:       The College Community  
From:      The President  
Subject:   Faculty Action at its Meeting of June 12, 1968

Attached is a copy of the Faculty Resolution adopted at its meeting of June 12, 1968. Also attached is a statement which I made to the Faculty at that meeting.

Bennington College  
June 13, 1968

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE FACULTY OF BENNINGTON COLLEGE AT ITS

MEETING OF JUNE 12, 1968

IN VIEW OF THE FACT

1. That some 204 students held a rump session in which they repudiated the constitutional process of the College, cast doubt on the good faith of the numerous faculty members and students who worked diligently, honestly and according to Constitutional authority to arrive at a resolution of the differences between constituent elements of the community;
2. that this rump caucus had serious and substantial complaints about the organization of student government and the curriculum and goals of the College; and
3. that neither this rump caucus, at a meeting which seems to have been intended to supplant all constitutional processes, nor any participant in it, had ever offered its conclusions about student government or suggested curriculum changes to either the student constituency or the faculty constituency or any of the authorized committees of those constituencies; but had instead
4. presented an ultimatum -- in what students themselves have termed a "power play" -- to the College designed to allow them to have their way "or else";

THEREFORE, THE FACULTY RESOLVES

- A. To regard the student protest as a serious and substantial indication of student discontent with the government, curriculum and aims of the College;
- B. To suggest to the President that he immediately call into session the

Community Council, representing all the constituencies, which Council was recommended by the Faculty Committee on Community Government, the Constitutional Council, and the recent Day of Self-Study;

- C. to have the President charge that Community Council as its first act to organize a more extended period of self-study than the one which recently was held; such self-study to take place before the fall term of 1968 and to involve meetings of the College constituencies, joint meetings of standing faculty and student committees and community meetings, and to make use of the report of the Student Summer Self-Study Project; the result of such week of joint deliberation to be fed into the regular constitutional processes of the College at the earliest possible time;
- D. to set aside 5 days before the beginning of term for that purpose during which time all faculty and upper-class students without other binding commitments are to be in attendance;
- E. to give its full and unqualified support to the student Summer Self-Study Committee, a project initiated solely by students and to be run solely by them, which has already had the support of Faculty EPC and the Administration;
- F. to recommend to the President that he treat the student petition in serious terms -- terms the students themselves who reject hypocrisy would want -- by interpreting it as an intention to withdraw from the College because they reject its constitution and the rules and regulations enacted under it;
- G. to recommend to the President that he not act on the intention of graduating seniors to withdraw, since withdrawal at this late date would seem a totally inappropriate response for students who will not be continuing members of the College community; however, if any graduating senior feels strongly about not wanting to receive a degree from

Bennington College because of her distaste for its Constitution, rules and standards, she may confirm her desire to withdraw to the President before Commencement, and her degree should not, of course be conferred,

- H. to instruct the Faculty Committee on Community Government to draw up a statement, to be used as might be appropriate, reflecting the College Community's judgment concerning the seniors' action;
- I. to instruct the President to write to all petitioning students who are not graduating, inquiring from such students whether they wish, after a due and sufficient period of deliberation, to confirm such intention to withdraw and, if not, whether they accept as a condition of their returning to the College that they abide by its Constitution and the rules and standards adopted under it until such time as the Constitution or rules and standards are changed. Each student who indicates an intention to return should also be invited to submit a statement containing his or her suggestions for change in the College, to be directed, in the first instance, to the Student Summer Self-Study group.



PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT TO THE FACULTY OF BENNINGTON COLLEGE

PROPOSING THE RESOLUTION ADOPTED AT ITS MEETING,

JUNE 12, 1968

I urge the adoption of the Resolution I have just read for the following reasons:

1. To do nothing would be to underestimate the gravity of the problem and to take the students' views less seriously than we should and than they would want us to. No academic community can prosper if half its members consider themselves outside of its constitution and arrogate unto themselves the power to make radical changes in the College by threat, ultimatum or blatant violations of its rules, rather than through regular constitutional processes.
2. Any lesser action than treating the student petition as tantamount to an expression of an intention to resign would be inappropriate and demean this faculty, the College and its Constitution.
3. With a number of my faculty colleagues, I am as restive as most students about the need for radical change on this campus. But I am committed to constitutional and deliberative process as deeply as I am to change and I am not prepared under any circumstances, to accept rump caucuses of selected students and a few selected faculty members as an appropriate substitute for constitutional or deliberative Community process, however slow it is.
4. To fail now to act vigorously, though not vindictively, would be to invite repeated challenges of this kind which would -- as at least some few students intend it to -- bring this College, in the immortal words of Mario Savio, "to a grinding halt."
5. I believe that some of the students involved are simply political "sore losers" in regard to the Constitutional issue. Although it requires

revision in many respects, our College Constitution provides for a degree of student participation in the decision making process more liberal than any other college in the Country. Students had every conceivable opportunity to present their case, even some inconceivable opportunities, in the sense that faculty and administration went to inconceivable lengths over a 7 or 8 month period to hear and consider each of their arguments on the "24 hour rule." They lost under the existing rules by which we resolve differences between the constituencies and now they want to call a political forfeit, and, on their own, make rules which would ensure that they always win.

6. I believe strongly that most of the students who have undertaken this protest lack the perspective of life on other college campuses to educate and restrain their judgment of this College. This College is, and will continue to be, despite its faults, one of the best in the nation because of its fine students -- not excluding, of course, those who have taken part in this protest, a devoted faculty, and responsible trustees. Failing to take action now would jeopardize the achievements of all involved.
7. A word about the risks we run in taking these students at their word and intention.

No student is expendable and we should give each of these students a real opportunity to reconsider. We very much want each of them back. But if, after deliberation, a number of them reaffirm their intention to withdraw because it is against their consciences and good judgment to live within the constitutional framework of our community, we will be able to replace them with other students who want and need the brand of education this faculty provides. We are already over-subscribed by 40 students; we have a substantial waiting list of other students who

want admission. Of the 204 students who signed the petition some 53 are either graduating seniors or had already indicated before they signed the petition that they wanted to withdraw. Many others on the list will, I am certain, reconsider. We will be able to replace the rest or if not, we are prepared to suffer some financial loss to maintain the integrity of the faculty and the College.

8. While I reject the form of this protest, I honor and have great respect for the serious concern which lies beyond it and for the overall sense of responsibility of almost all of the students concerned.
9. Finally, I would urge you all to support the resolution, already supported unanimously by the Faculty Committee on Community Government, in order to help ensure real change and the growth of a new and better College community. There is nothing I have recommended to you previous to this occasion, about which I feel more certain; nothing I could urge upon you more strongly.