

## A Form for Student Action

Based on the premise that only certain kinds of information was discussed during orientation, I think it important that new students now be acquainted with the following issue -- and certain events which occurred last semester.

Last semester's community meetings were the scene for what I affectionately refer to as "student uproars". The topic of the uproars could be entitled "The Rise and Fall of Student Power at an Otherwise Progressive Institute" or "Why Weren't We Told That the School Would Expand so Clumsily?" The condition which triggered off the uproar was that several classes were so overcrowded that some students feared (1) their education was being sacrificed, and (2) that the barn might collapse. The overcrowding was due to Bennington's transition to a larger student size.

The complaints about overcrowding touched on a more extensive concern -- that students no longer have the power in policy formation (i.e. expansion of the school) that was one of Bennington's marks as a progressive school.

In order for students to assume the power I believe is available to them, I am suggesting a slight expansion of the Educational Policy Committee (EPC) system. Each class now elects a student EPC representative with whom the class evaluates the specific class and its teacher. Because Student EPC is a well organized structure for student communication, I would like to see it used in a more powerful way. In each class, discussion could be extended to include school policy and departmental demands.

When the information from each class is centralized by student EPC leaders, plans for student action could be organized accordingly. In this way student opinion on policy could be defined, articulated, and acted on.

For example, one issue that could be handled in this matter is the following: despite several community votes which specifically turned down the proposition that Bennington become coeducational, we find this year that the Bennington College Catalogue states otherwise:

"Bennington College is a four-year undergraduate college for women (and, occasionally, well-qualified men.)"

(Bennington Review, pg. 4  
1967-68)

According to reliable sources, this coup was brought about by a trustee decision. I have nothing against coeducational institutions -- on the contrary; nevertheless the trustee decision reduces student power in this case to nil, and makes a mockery of these community votes.

If students discussed with their class EPC representative how they felt about the decision to admit "well qualified men", a student consensus could be obtained. When EPC leader tabulated their findings

and found, for example, that most students were infused with indignation, a student referendum could be called. This could be followed by a student demand that the College handbook be rewritten next term to indicate community, and not trustee policy, on that issue.

The social structure of Bennington is undergoing change with expansion. It's a time for revision of some school structures, and for decision making on every level that the expansion touches. Because it is a time of change, I think it important that students begin to use the power that is available to them -- so that they play a part in making the decisions that will necessarily follow in the next several terms.

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P.S. If anyone is interested in knowing more about last term's community meetings, I will be glad to lend you the paper I wrote about them.